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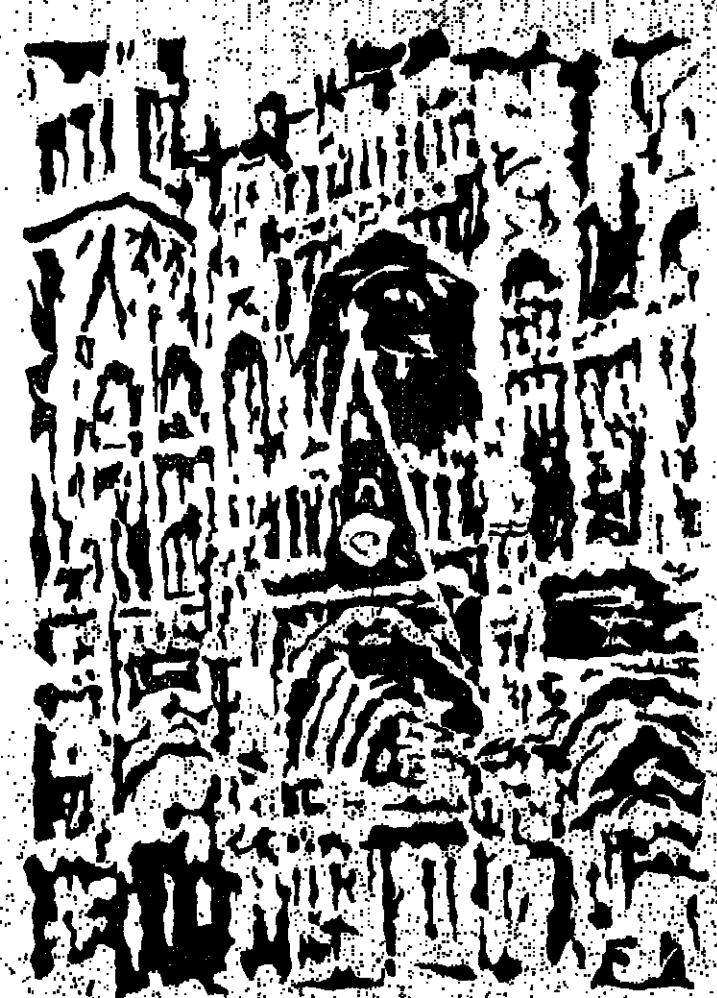
TLS
THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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Marxism and ideology
Angela Thirkell; the Knox brothers; Frederick Ashton

James Merrill at the ouija board
'Words and Women'
Shakespeare, Hilliard and Dr Hotson

Maugham; the Woolfs; Vernon Watkins
Eliot's early years
Slater Walker; 'Hospital'; The Battle of Britain
Commentary: Translating, Remaindering



"Drawing for a Cathedral", 1969, by Roy Lichtenstein, which he used as the basis for a series of lithographs: "a fluid vibrating ink drawing reminiscent of German Expressionist prints", writes Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr., in his American Master Drawings and Watercolors (464pp. Harper and Row, New York, \$19.95), a survey of American draftsmanship from Colonial times to the present day. A major exhibition based on the book, which was conceived by The Drawing Society, has been seen in Minneapolis, New York and San Francisco during 1976-77.

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Thoughts and circumstances

By Kenneth Minogue

MARTIN SELIGER:
The Marxist Conception of Ideology
229pp. Cambridge University Press.
£6.50.

The Marxist doctrine of ideology is an understandable, if paradoxical achievement for such a professional man of thought as Marx was. It is paradoxical because men usually believe in the importance of what they do, and most philosophers have in fact been convinced of the autonomy of thought, of its capacity to leap the bounds of man's condition to reach the stars. If thought merely follows at the heels of our daily business, it is something much less grand and powerful than we have generally been prone to think. Yet such is the view taken by Marx and Engels, and understandably so. For they sought to make a revolution, and one of the threats to their endeavour was the long-standing Western belief that nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so. Marx decried equally all forms of the belief that salvation comes by thought. Hence, in spite of many difficulties, his project of revolution committed him to a form of what became the doctrine of ideology.

The term "ideology" was, of course, appropriated from the original *idéologies* of the French Revolution who had invented their new science of ideas as a branch of zoology. The theory consisted in asserting that what human beings think is determined by the socio-economic conditions in which they live, and the thing in the doctrine, the element that saves it from being a mere banality, lies in the word "determined". Feudal men cannot help but think feudal thoughts, bourgeois men bourgeois thoughts, and transitional men (which is most of us) will find our thoughts reflecting what Marx believed to be the contradictions of our socio-economic circumstances. As we read in *The German Ideology*: "We can say, for instance, that during the time the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts of honour, loyalty etc. were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie, the concepts freedom, equality etc." Yet the idea of "dominance" in such pas-

sages leaves a lot more to argument than the confident tone of these two young men would suggest.

The *German Ideology* failed to find a publisher and, left to "the gnawing criticism of the mice", had to be put together from yellowed manuscripts long after Marx died. But the theory itself has had a runaway success. Half the world's intellectuals seem to be persuaded that human life is a matter of blundering through the mists of class-bound thoughts, though few hold this theory without granting themselves the boon of superior wisdom. Thus such a conviction is widespread testifies to a bizarre triumph of human illusion over logical necessity, since the theory of ideology cannot escape the element of contradiction resulting from being itself made the subject of its own application. When (to take more or less at random, an example from a contemporary architectural review) someone writes: "There can be no concept of architecture which is not distorted by history or ideology", the drearily obvious question arises: if so, how can the writer know it to be so? Indeed, how can he know, not merely that it has always been so, but necessarily must be so? Still, if we indulgently take the view that what large numbers of intelligent people fervently believe can't be all wrong, what can we make of the doctrine? How could we possibly test such an opinion as that "it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness"?

A crude but effective test might be to assemble a set of stock brokers, mill-owners and landlords, explain to them the theory of the class struggle, and see if they could understand it. If they found it impossible to grasp because they had too long been immersed in a measure of profit and loss, we could indeed conclude that the mode of production had so bent their minds as to determine their consciousness. But this, we know, is false. Plainly, capitalists are so far unconstrained by their place in the productive process as to have no difficulty whatsoever in understanding what Marxism is about. There are even some of them who believe it to be a true account of the human condition. Indeed, if the

theory of ideology had merely pointed to facts as obvious as these, then we should not have had to wait for Marx and Engels to tell us so. Further, although Marxism presents itself as the "ideology" of the proletariat, a manner of thought "reflecting" what workers experience in factories, it does not seem to be true that many workers look up from their lathes and mutter to themselves: "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness." This is not at all because lots of workers do not arrive at similar responses to their working situation. From a mixture of experience and imitation, they have in large numbers taken up the practice of trade unions, and many of them have a disposition to affirm an ethic of solidarity: "The union makes us strong", as the old song has it. But not all workers, not all of the time; and furthermore, what they believe in is not a theory of ideology, but a collection of successful practices.

The most obvious meaning of the theory of ideology is, then, palpably false. How else might we account for the plausibility of the doctrine? The best suggestion would seem to be that, looking back to a now finished historical epoch, we may well find that much of the thought of the time, as it has come down to us, exhibits a determinate character. It may be classical rather than romantic, take social hierarchies rather than equality for granted. Further, we can often illuminate the thought by connecting it with what, for these purposes, we distinguish as the "events" of the period. Thus the thought of such people as Hobbes, Descartes and Newton has been linked to the growth of markets in the seventeenth century. There is no doubt that some of these links have a certain explanatory plausibility. But they never achieve anything like the *factis* that would make us say, as Marx and Engels do, "conditioning". In other words, there is no possible characterization of economic life in the seventeenth century which necessarily implies the sovereign theory of the state, the *cogito ergo sum*, or Newtonian physics. It will be said, of course, that to expect such exact connections is rigid and mechanical; only vulgar Marxists and hostile critics would expect such precise relations between base

and superstructure. It is particularly the rather despised Engels who is responsible for the view that while the mode of production determines the general trend of things, it does not, and could not possibly, determine every detail. Engels tries to have things both ways: the theory is right if it applies at all, and is subject to no risks.

A theory possessing such a convenience of application is inevitably confused; and oddly enough, Marx himself is a trenchant critic of this very same confusion which he attributes to the French eighteenth-century socialists in his third thesis on Feuerbach. Still, the confusions in Engels are at least a testimony to his drive towards clarity of thought, something not to be expected from Marx's own more dogmatic formulations. Terms invoked in defence of Marxist theory, terms such as "rigid", "mechanical" and "vulgar", are, in this area of discourse, nothing more than instruments of intellectual abuse. It is precisely the strength of genuine scientific theories that they are rigid and mechanical, rather than flexible, since this means that they take the risk of being proved wrong by the evidence.

The fallacy committed by those who rely on this kind of historical evidence is to assume that past and future are symmetrical. It is undoubtedly true that the thinkers of a past epoch are not going to think any further thoughts, and that those we have available are all they can think. But this provides no evidence at all that these were the only thoughts they could have thought. An unwarranted assumption of necessity has been smuggled into the evidence, and then extrapolated forward to generate the implication that "we" cannot do else but think the thoughts generated by our socio-economic circumstances. But the emptiness of this theory becomes apparent if we demand the impossible: that we should be told, now, what thoughts we cannot think because of ideological limitations.

Its deficiencies have become increasingly evident. These days the doctrine glitters in some of the sunnier areas of politics, but so far as serious philosophy is concerned, it only remains to reinstate all those familiar ideas (such as "intelligence", "character", "truth") which were temporarily cast into shadow by the ascendancy of "ideology".

Martin Seliger's *The Marxist Conception of Ideology* may be counted as part of the clearing process. It has been spun off from a larger and more inclusive project of analysing the whole subject which earlier led to the publication of *Ideology and Politics* (1976).

The idea of ideology so far discussed in this review is the product of understanding all thought generated by society, as honey by bee. But the word ideology has also come to mean, for complicated reasons, a particular sort of political doctrine. In his earlier work, Professor Seliger took the view that "ideology" was a statement of political values, and (therefore) to be found in *any* political doctrine, an argument which gains its significance from the fact that it contradicts the alternative opinion that an ideology is a special sort of political doctrine, usually one that appeals to the masses and leads towards a totalitarian state. Following up what he calls his "lock-alive" view of ideology (i.e. every thing qualifies), Professor Seliger distinguishes between the constitutive principles of an ideology, and the tactical arguments by which it deals with its immediate situation. These two components were called the "fundamental" and the "operative" dimensions of ideology, and were explained with the aid of an alarming battery of diagrams.

The Marxist Conception of Ideology carries this apparatus over from the earlier book, but is fundamentally concerned with the analytic exercise of showing how later Marxists such as Bernstein, Lenin, Lukács and Mannheim, faced up to the many lingering problems bequeathed to them by the founder of the doctrine.

It is clear to Seliger, as it is to Mannheim, that "the doctrine" needs to be kept alive, and Engels's idea of "ideology" had to go. The founder's distorted ideology, which is always distorted theory with science, which is the principle that Seliger detests, the Mannheimians have, as it were, turned the theory upside down and insisted that the social determination of thought is as much an opportunity as a handicap. There may well be, in other words, truths we

are only likely to discover because of changes in the way we live. This certainly accords much more with common-sense experience than the original doctrine.

It does indeed seem to be true that, once the dazzling concept of ideology has settled down into the humdrum academic machinery of the sociology of knowledge, interesting connections can be made between thought and circumstance. But the conditions of any such illumination include not only abandoning a definitional insistence upon the falseness of ideology, but also an abandonment of far-reaching claims to have discovered what determines thought. Mannheim can best be salvaged from the general ruin of writings on ideology if we interpret him as arguing that the sociology of knowledge is a form of critical self-awareness that can save us from at least some of the errors likely to result from our limited social perspectives. If so, Freud, he believed that awareness of the unconscious "determinants" of our thoughts (in his case, the sociological "determinants") would increase our freedom and help us solve the crisis of our time through which he believed himself to be living.

The original Marxist theory is much more ambitious. As Seliger writes, "a disparity is assumed between the conceptions of those involved in social action and the true nature of the actions." This is, no doubt, the most emotionally satisfying version of the theory, allowing its exponents to see others as puppets on the strings of socio-economic determination. The way the theory is actually used by Marx is as a rhetorical device for dismissing competitors as the spokesmen for some disreputable section of society—as when Proudhon, for example, was dismissed as not only wrong but as the exponent of petty bourgeois ideology. The clue is to be found in *The German Ideology* itself, an essentially polemical attack on Marx's earlier associates who are there dismissed as "pompous and arrogant hucksters of ideas".

This dazzlingly self-confident view of the world can be developed into the theory of "false consciousness" in which whole batches of people are asserted to entertain beliefs about their situation which are not "appropriate to" or "consonant with" (there is a variety of equally vague connectives available) their real situation. As the theory was developed by Lukács, the principle that Seliger detests, "false consciousness" was taken to imply that the actual consciousness of whole classes could be false.

Acting reasonably

By Peter Winch

MARTIN HOLLIS:
Models of Man
Philosophical Thoughts on Social Action
195pp. Cambridge University Press.
£7 (paperback, £2.50).

Causation, Martin Hollis insists, is transitive. If lightning causes a forest fire and the forest fire causes the death of a man, then the lightning-flash causes the man's death. On the other hand, if I leave a hatchet in my kitchen the sight of which gives you the idea of killing your rival, which you then do, we should not want to say that I caused your rival's death by leaving the hatchet in my kitchen. The lack of transitivity here, and in similar cases, is connected, obviously, with the idea of human agency. The main theme of *Models of Man* is to isolate and explicate the concept of the autonomous agent and to determine what mode of explanation of human actions is compatible with and appropriate to such a concept.

Within the context of causal explanation a man's individuality consists in no more than his being "the only instance of the interaction of competing laws", and he is conceived as both "plastic" and "passive". These consequences can be avoided only to the extent that a man's actions can be explained in some way other than as flowing necessarily from some thing else—namely, that he is other than himself. But we do have such a mode of explanation, Mr. Hollis means for his ends; but his ends, representation of a man's rationality, is rational. The rationality of action is its own explanation.

Activists like Lenin saw it as their role to "correct" the consciousness of the people. The whole manner of discourse takes it for granted that so the people possess the truth while their purposes need to be corrected. As Seliger comments:

So conceived and known to its self-appointed seers, objective class consciousness is attributable to a class without being entertained by it. It is, as the Sombart has already explained, "rationally imputed" consciousness, a notion which he irreverently, but to my mind oppositely, appraised as "a bluff" with a thoroughly anti-democratic intent at that.

The story Seliger has to tell is of a steady refinement of the idea of ideology from the time of Marx and Engels onwards. He himself contributes to this development by pointing out many of the inadequacies of the theory of ideology as commonly conceived. One of the main problems is that of basing ideology on class, for a class is not what he calls an "action-unit", and it would have to be if we are to make sense of much that Marx and Engels say about classes. An action-unit is a group of people with a purpose and an appropriate organization for that purpose; and this is certainly not the character of those conceptual pluralities called "the bourgeoisie" and "the proletariat". In Marxist terms, their intellectual conditioning depends on their relation to the mode of production, and one might well wonder whether wives for example, relate to the mode of production in the same manner as husbands (leaving aside for the moment the tortuous question of how anybody relates to such an abstraction). Marx seldom missed a trick with the constituency of women.

It is a further difficulty of the whole theory that very large numbers of propositions entertained by political opponents, and also by members of different classes, are the same. Bourgeois and proletarian employer and employee, in fact usually agree on the facts over a very considerable range. Seliger, for no very good reason, refers to this as "propositional pluralism" and goes on to develop his technicalities by pairing it with "ideological pluralism". Men from different classes often agree on ideas and purposes. He cites Mannheim, for example, in the case of the nineteenth-century conservatism and Marxism, share the same preoccupation with collectivities . . . to

which the individual will is (or ought to be) subordinate. . . . The practical significance in connection of corporate interests, he suggests, is essentially the same as in fascist Spain and Titoist Yugoslavia. In these ways, he successfully achieves a steady erosion of the ground on which the grand generalities of the theory of ideology base their appeal.

And in the end it is the vagueness of the theory which is its undoing. Plenty of people make mistakes, and there is no assertion which cannot be false, but when it comes to specifying precisely what beliefs are inevitably entertained by what precise class of people, the whole house of cards collapses into a bluff about not being rigid and mechanical. The consequence is that Seliger's story is fundamentally that of a weird detour in the history of thought: an excursion must with a plausible but false notion of intellectual determinism which led to endless permutations and combinations of propositions about the relation of basis and superstructure but in the end told us nothing.

Step by step the absurdities of this enchantment were dropped off until even Marxists found it solved back in a situation which would be entirely familiar to intelligent men of all ages: men think with the materials available, and in retrospect the historian can point to many interesting and illuminating connections between the thought of a time and the social and economic circumstances. But the latter never actually determined the former, and what we shall all be thinking a decade hence is as much a mystery to the devotees of a theory of ideology as it is to the rest of us.

Professor Seliger has thus done a useful job in bringing into focus many of the issues raised by this whole subject, and he has a considerable, if somewhat catchy, mastery of the literature of the subject. But he is a jack of many languages but not entirely a master of English. There is, for example, a Frenchman screaming to get out of some of his prose, as when he uses the English verb "ignore" in the totally effortless manner of the French verb *ignorer*. But defects of style are often those of thought, and it must be said that Professor Seliger often falls in his sentences to make clear, quite how they should be taken, leaving the reader to puzzle them out in terms of the context. And this is a pity, since he has many useful things to say.

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A family and its humour

By Malcolm Muggeridge

PENELOPE FITZGERALD:

The Knox Brothers
294pp. Macmillan. £4.95.

Penelope Fitzgerald's judgment was absolutely correct in deciding to deal with the four Knox brothers as an entity rather than just writing a biography of her father, Eddie (better known as Evvo, the pen name he took for his writings in *Punch*), and bringing in her three uncles, Dilly, Wilfred and Ronnie, as and when they arose. They were all four remarkably gifted, with close family ties, and collectively more than the sum of the four of them as individuals. This is skilfully brought out in Mrs Fitzgerald's narrative: each chapter deals successively with the four brothers in order of seniority, but also indicates their relationships with one another—their corporate existence, as it were. Even in their physical appearance and ways, though ostensibly very different, there were extraordinarily like, with the same extraordinary mouth, and beguiling air of innocence, and way of muttering under their breath and saying very funny things very quietly.

Part of the charm of Mrs Fitzgerald's book is the affectionate spirit in which it is written; the judgments are firm, and sometimes sharp, but always considerate and often comical. There was a special bond of Knox humour with which all who knew them will have been familiar, and which Mrs Fitzgerald manages to convey. Indeed, she is an accomplished practitioner herself. The brothers could perfectly well have taken over *Punch* as a team instead of leaving it to Evvo, because in that case, lacking Dilly's services as a cipher-cracker, we should probably have lost the 1939-45 war; lacking Wilfred as a priest, the Anglican Church would have been deprived of its best chance for a canonization; and lacking Ronnie as a Roman Catholic convert, Harold Macmillan would have been without his earliest mentor and Evelyn Waugh without his most estimable friend.

As I well know from my *Punch* days, nothing is harder than specifying brands of humour. The Knox style was understatement carried to extremes of icy objectivity which could easily pass as callousness. For instance, Dilly's remark about his experience as a motor-cyclist, "It's amazing how people smile and apologise to you, when you knock

them over." Or Ronnie's throw-away line when arguing that being a Christian does not necessarily involve thinking that things are getting better: "Surely there is a place for pessimism."

Again, talking with him once about how difficult translating the Bible must be, he cited by way of example how, allegedly in some African vernacular version, an eternal crown was rendered as "a hat that will never wear out". I like, too, Evvo's reminiscence of how Sir Owen Seaman, his predecessor as editor of *Punch*, upon whom editorial responsibilities sat rather heavily, observed of someone or other: "He is the kind of man who doesn't take his humour seriously."

"Evvo" was chosen as a pen-name, it seems to distinguish Eddie (E. V. Knox) from E. V. Lucas, something that anyone might wish to do. An additional reason was that in the dictionary "Evvo" was given as a cry of rejoicing offered to the victor and "here, Mrs Fitzgerald tells us, the point depended on pronouncing "Evvo" as "E.V.", whereas in practice everyone pronounced it as a variant of "heave-ho!", so the joke, such as it was, fell flat—a good beginning, Mrs Fitzgerald sagely remarks, in true Knoxian vein, for a professional humorist.

The father of these four unusual men was a strongly evangelical clergyman who became Bishop of Manchester, the family's origins were in Ulster, and the sons up-bringing was stern—they were expected to memorize a chapter of the Bible, Authorized Version of course, each day—but never unkind or consciously inconsiderate. Bishop Knox's first wife, to his deep sorrow died when his children were still young, and for a time they were boarded out with relatives of varying degrees of agreeableness. Then the Bishop remarried, choosing an obviously delightful lady known in the family as Mrs K. As a result, the family's permanent on her own account, since she wrote in his diary on her wedding day "Finished this Antigone. Married Bin."

Two of the four brothers—Wilfred and Ronnie—followed their father in becoming ordained, though his considerable distress and the disappointment, Wilfred as a High Anglican and Ronnie as a Roman Catholic convert. Dilly was a considerable Greek scholar in addition to his cipher-cracking feats—he played a leading role in unravelling the intricacies of Ultra, the enciphering machine the Germans doggedly went on using throughout the 1939-45 war, to their great detriment. At Bletchley Park, the headquarters of the cipher-crackers, he was a legendary figure, and, as Mrs Fitzgerald recounts, hastened his own death from cancer by refusing to stop working as the

symptoms worsened. I marvel at the skill and clarity with which Mrs Fitzgerald depicts her father's and her uncles' various pursuits. Her account of Ultra is impeccable, she takes *Punch* in her stride, and seems equally at home with Dilly's Greek studies as with the theological and linguistic complexities of Ronnie and Wilfred. Altogether a remarkable performance.

No doubt as a result of their upbringing, but I should have said also temperamentally, the brothers were God-faithful: Dilly and Evvo negatively, Dilly being an ardent unbeliever, and Evvo a dyed-in-the-wool sceptic until the last years of his life, when he reverted to conventional Anglicanism, and might be seen any Sunday morning taking up the collection at Hampstead parish church. With Wilfred and Ronnie, of course, it was the other way: they were both devout piety, and if in Ronnie's case there was a certain admixture of worldliness, without any question his dedication as a priest and as a Christian was total.

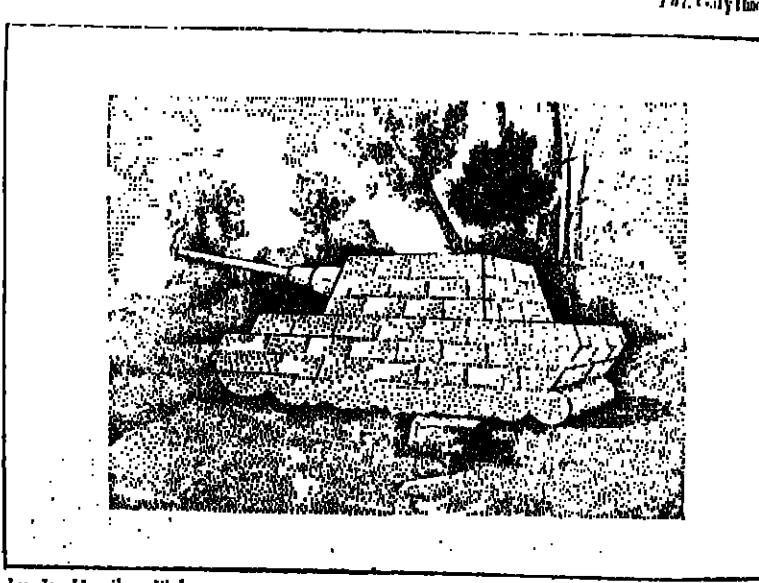
Wilfred was the most, in the true Christian sense, unworldly human being I have ever known. I got to know him in my fourth year at Cambridge when he was Warden of Orlatory House, belonging to the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, a High Anglican community of married priests and laymen. I used to help him in the garden, and sometimes serve for him at the morning Eucharist—on very cold mornings he would put a hot-water bottle under his garments which gave him a slight air of pregnancy.

That was in 1924, but even across the more than fifty years I have a vivid memory of a special kind of purity he exuded which made being with him an enchantment. Mrs Fitzgerald's account of his death in 1939 is beautifully done, and contains two sayings of his that I shall cherish: "at extreme illness the soul 'fetches its breath' as the body fetches its breath, and that to think of eternity as static and so boring is quite wrong, since there is always something new about it, and love and in our power to love."

Mrs Fitzgerald's picture of Ronnie corrects, or perhaps one should say in charity, supplements, the Evelyn Waugh biography—an oddly unattractive book, though I understand it is the best of motives. She manages to bring to life a man troubled and divided in his nature which never quite became explicit, least of all to himself. Certainly, at the end of his life, when he was living at Mells in Mrs Raymond Asquith's Manor House, he seemed somehow forlorn, and his posthumous reputation has come to rest rather on his early sparkling satirical writings than on what he regarded as his major work, *Enthusiasm*, or on his translation of the Bible, which gave him a lot



Mr. Ian Hamilton Finlay



Mr. Ian Hamilton Finlay

"Et in Arcadia Ego": above, Poussin's second version of the theme, and below, Ian Hamilton Finlay's version of Poussin. From the series "Foot notes to an Essay"—the essay in question being Erwin Panofsky's "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition". "The five primary illustrations, drawn by Gary Hineke after the crucial illustrations in Panofsky's text, are supplemented by five further versions which incorporate Finlay's 'translations'." writes Stephen Dunn in the catalogue of the Arts Council exhibition of Finlay's work recently shown at the Saatchi Gallery in London (96pp. £2.50).

of trouble, partly due to his ecclesiastical superiors, but also because, knowing most of the Authorized Version by heart, he remained in thrall to it.

Oddly enough, it is Evvo who emerges least clearly at Mrs Fitzgerald's hands. This may be precisely because he was her father, though he was anyway a very elusive person. Certainly, I found him so when I used to meet him at the *Punch* table, and lunched with him once or twice at the Garrick Club. On one of these occasions he told me he had reason to believe that Braxton in Max Beerbohm's famous story was based on Sir Owen Se-

man, an interesting hypothesis. When I left *Punch* I never thought to hear from him again, and then on the Christmas before he died I had a card on which he had traced "Evvo" in big letters, though clearly with a shaky hand. It was a kind of farewell handshake, and touched me very much. We may be sure that by now the brothers will have somehow managed to get together—maybe in Purgatory. How they may be placed, they will have every reason to be well satisfied with Mrs Fitzgerald's performance; she has done them proud, done them truly and done them lovingly. A memorable and delightful book.

Press, which accompany an account of Leonard and Virginia's respective literary and administrative roles in its management. Much of this may seem to add up to a narrow and chequered life, but it reveals much about the characters of both parties.

The authors have been fortunate in the amount of novel photographic material available to them—"our raggedly fortunate" as Quentin writes rather enviously in his introduction. The book is made up of full-page illustrations, and there are many half-page pictures. The best relate to their life in Sussex, with friends (such as a noticeably moustached V. Sackville-West) and in their home, with a few recent estate-agency prints to add to the Woolf's own snapshots. A few documents are illustrated, including Virginia's last letter to Leonard (accurately rendered in the facing page's transcription); "I feel certain I am going mad again." It is presented as written on Friday, March 28, 1941, after she had already written to Leonard and Vanessa about the voices she had started hearing again. But it is clearly headed "Tuesday". This is a mistake, was the letter written three days before? There is a problem Mr Nicolson and Miss Trautman may solve for us in the final volume of their edition.

The voice of Mrs Exeter

By Maurice Richardson

MARGOT STRICKLAND:

Portrait of a Lady Novelist
182pp. Duckworth. £5.95.

She died in 1960, aged seventy, but her tall shade—blue rinse by the little Polish hairdresser in the Cathedral Close—can still be seen at Conservative coffee mornings leading the silvery tinkle of witticisms at some house by local Labour councillors. At the party conference, hers was the faintly parrot-like shush-voice that murmured: "Well done, Margaret, my dear. You speak so nicely now." Between the wars and during the 1940s and 1950s she and her novels were the quintessence of what was called, in the higher reaches of the rag trade, "Mrs Exeter".

The novels, as Margot Strickland found when testing present-day reactions for this painstaking biography, aroused strong reactions. They were even stronger before the war. At a meeting, in 1939, of the Writers and Readers Group of the Left Book Club, an Old Wyclavian Marxist speaker singled out the work of Angela Thirkell for "the current of vicious ruling-class complacency which it disseminates. This, of course, is no accident, but cunningly disguised propaganda, as indeed are the novels of P. G. Wodehouse who, in Bertie Wooster and the Drones, is consciously whitewashing the sinister reactionary twelfth-century counterparts of the Restoration Rakes".

One can find complacency in her books, but I do not think it has much to do with class. It is a special kind of coy complacency that is part of the lady novelist's writing persona. Narcissistic in origin, it can irritate, but it is somehow connected with the secret of compulsive readability. During her heyday you could scarcely open a shopping bag in Port Street, Budeleigh Salterton, at Harford Road, without finding an Angela Thirkell inside, while in New York they made cracks about disappointed ladies complaining "But I thought this was a Thirkellising library".

The reality behind this phenomenon was rather more interesting than you might think. The daughter, Angela Mackall, daughter of Professor J. W. Mackall, OM, the Greek scholar and translator, Burne-Jones was her grandfather's Kilgiving and Stanley Baldwin her cousin; Barrie was her godfather. Precisely where the light-fiction genre came from we don't know. But it is interesting that her brother, Denis,

also inherited it. Margot Strickland is a bit too sweeping in her dismissal of Denis Mackall. He was a typical 1920s whiffy merchant, author of novels—*Greenery Street* was one—about the misadventures of nice young couples, and a contributor to E. V. Knox's *Punch*.

Angela was brought up in London, against a background of fashionable artistic society. She grew to be a swan-necked beauty and sat to Sargent, John Collier, and, dressed up as Sidiya the Sorceress, to Neville Lytton. Her first husband was James MacInnes, a North Country singer. He looked like a blend of his son Colin and a satyr. Arthur Balfour, always susceptible to made charm, had suggested to Lady Glenconner that she ask him to sing at dinner. There Angela, just turned twenty-one, met him and fell. As a husband

James was in the maverick category. He belonged to that rare but extraordinary breed of alcoholic who gets drunk at the smell of a cork and stays drunk. He made love to his singing pupils at all hours, even when Angela was giving birth to their first child. She divorced him in 1917.

Her next husband, George Lancelot Thirkell, was a young Tasmanian engineer. Wounded at Gallipoli, he went to convalesce at Glamis Castle where, says Margot Strickland, "it seems that something in the nature of a friendship sprang up between Lady Elizabeth and Captain Thirkell. At seventeen she was in the full flower of her girlish beauty—her grey eyes were set in a complexion like a wild rose, round which curled tendrils of dark hair. In the sunshine, seated in wicker basket chairs, they took each other's



A portrait of Tolstoy "improved" by Max Beerbohm: the undated "improvement" was made on the frontispiece to a translation by Aylmer Maude of Tolstoy's *What is Art?*, published by Thomas Y. Crowell around 1900. Beerbohm, who once called Tolstoy "an improved cat", wrote on the facing tissue: "There were those who said that Tolstoy was self-conscious. It would be more just to say that he was conscious of himself." Aylmer Maude. From J. G. Rieuwoldt's well-documented new study Beerbohm's Literary Caricatures, (295pp including 104 plates. Allen Lane. £7.50).

photographs with her box camera."

Lady Elizabeth married the Duke of York, however, and George was posted to a training camp in Wiltshire. Angela met him in the Manor where she had met MacInnes. They set off for Australia in 1920. But Australia was a mistake, and so was George, though not in the same bracket as MacInnes. She stuck it for ten years, and left in 1929, after George had gone bankrupt with her (the Sargent church portrait, her youngest son Lancelot Thirkell, and not much else).

It took her a little while to get started as a writer but by 1933 she was on the verge of best-sellerdom with her third novel, *High Rising*. She was lucky in finding the perfect publisher in Hamish Hamilton, who knew exactly how to handle her. In *High Rising* she herself appears as Laura Moreland, a novelist, carrying out imaginary flirtations with both her dashing young dark publisher and her literary mentor, "George Knox", a thinly disguised version of E. V. Lucas. Ladies of a certain age, still avid—though they must never show it—for romance, yet a long way off the menopausal Medusa stage, trail their rainbow-coloured organdie summer dresses in and out of a number of her novels.

She struck up a great friendship with a much younger man, Gilbert Barker. "An un-gilded Barker" she called him, who helped her with her life of Harriette Wilson, and found her charm "quite extraordinary". "Did they or didn't they?" asks Margot Strickland and answers: "It is unlikely. Years later, when asked about writing her memoirs, Angela Thirkell said: 'Though my career has been chequered, there have been no lovers or lesbians.'"

She was not exactly a success as a mother. It was tactless and cruel of her to insist that George should bend his two stepsons really hard. Graham, though he got on with her after a fashion, wrote of her that she was never able to give "the slightest physical contact". The rebellious Colin, homosexual and proud of it and liking to shock her by writing about it, detested her. At the bar of the French pub, Soho, his father would say, "If you want him to thump you, tell him how much you admire his mother's novels." After one final violent drunken scene, she cut Colin out of her will and wrote to a friend: "A woman's tenderest case can cease towards the child she bears."

She wrote thirty-five novels in all. More than two thirds of them are set in an imaginary county of Barsetshire. Any affinity with Tolstoy—or Jane Austen—is superficial. Mrs Thirkell had wit. She could write nicely and convey mood. But she confined herself to idiosyncratic and had little real talent for characterization. Her success was due to the euphoric social climate which she distilled. The individual titles, *Wild Strawberries*, *August*, *Brotherhood*, *The Admiralty*, *The Duke's Daughter*, merge like a dance of cabbage white butterflies into a generalized haze. The most controversial of them, in fact, was *Cheerfulness Breaks In*, in which the outbreak of war was seen from a Home Counties village and the emphasis was on what Mrs Exeter had to put up with from the evacuees. Ideologically it placed its author several degrees to the right of Evelyn Waugh. Alfred Knopf, her American publisher, begged her to tone it down, especially the anti-Jewish bits: she would only change the name Warburg to Warbury.

She went on writing her West of England novels until quite close to her death, but for some years she had been undergoing a process of premature aging towards the end was Caroline Lejeune, with whom she used to lap rum, and who shared her Barsetshire fantasy. On one occasion, so Paul Dahl told me, they were joined by Dorothy Sayers, described them as looking like "a trio of a very cross hot-cross buns, formidable in the extreme".

Margot Strickland has put a lot of work and thought into her study of this difficult subject. The book is packed with interesting detail, especially the part before 1914, the years of the Edwardian Afterglow, about which we can never have too much. And her sympathetic appreciation of Angela is very neatly balanced.

The headline hunter

By Norman Shrapnel

NUEL BARBER:

The Natives Were Friendly... So We Stayed the Night
226pp. Macmillan. £4.95.

Do we think—such is the fiction—of modern headlines and by-line fame—of Noel Barber as Anthony's brother, or is it the other way round? Noel is the journalist, and it must be fairly modest that it holds him from dropping the former Chancellor's name as vigorously as the others he bounces about all over this breathtakingly energetic autobiography. *The Natives Were Friendly... So We Stayed the Night*.

Indeed, he doesn't so much drop them as serve them at you. The book appropriately opens with Mr Barber on his career proceeds winningly through game, set and match. Barber of the Mail was good at more than just tennis. He was one of the most famous foreign correspondents in the business and he met everybody: now he recalls it all with a casual gusto that makes his book's appeal.

"I was talking to Picasso in his shop-cum-workroom at Vallauris"

he remarks, and it is quite as impressive in its way as the point of the story. We overheard Noel Barber, daughter of Professor J. W. Mackall, OM, the Greek scholar and translator, Burne-Jones was her grandfather's Kilgiving and Stanley Baldwin her cousin; Barrie was her godfather. Precisely where the light-fiction genre came from we don't know. But it is interesting that her brother, Denis,

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while, at the Georges Clug, a busier Ernest, Bevin fills an ornate room with his staff who are being served span and other NAAFI supplies by mystified waiters, since Bevin fears they will go on strike if asked to eat "bloody French food". Not surprisingly, Barber fared better at the Villa Mauresque where "I was always free to invite myself", though sometimes Somerset Maugham felt equally free to be as chilly to his guest as the avocado

"I loved the life of the headline hunter", Barber makes us believe, and it takes a disastrous "car crash to end what he unflinchingly calls his 'derring-do' dachshund talent for characterization. Her success was due to the euphoric social climate which she distilled. The individual titles, *Wild Strawberries*, *August*, *Brotherhood*, *The Admiralty*, *The Duke's Daughter*, merge like a dance of cabbage white butterflies into a generalized haze. The most controversial of them, in fact, was *Cheerfulness Breaks In*, in which the outbreak of war was seen from a Home Counties village and the emphasis was on what Mrs Exeter had to put up with from the evacuees. Ideologically it placed its author several degrees to the right of Evelyn Waugh. Alfred Knopf, her American publisher, begged her to tone it down, especially the anti-Jewish bits: she would only change the name Warburg to Warbury.

The process could be disenchanted, and enchantment was high on the list of popular press priorities. The correspondents' chased each other round a kind of Magic Circle line. The reality was to get there before the Express. Pursuing the Fuchs-Hillary Antarctic expedition in 1957 Barber, though handicapped at one point by finding his pen frozen to a lavatory pan, even managed to get there before Hillary. At the Pole, the Express quickly reported in due course. Barber Lunches with Hitler, was the Mail headline.

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Rodmell and its routine

By Alan Bell

GEORGE SPATER and IAN PARSONS:

A Marriage of True Minds
An Intimate Portrait of Leonard and Virginia Woolf
210pp. Cape and the Hogarth Press. £5.95.

George Spater and Ian Parsons have set out to give us not just another Bloomsbury book, but a short study of the joint lives of two of its most important members. In this they have generally succeeded, bringing out a wide range of material far from trivial information from the Woolf archives in Sussex University Library. Even if the result is more of a domestic than an intimate portrait of the marriage it is none the less satisfactory. The authors of course owe a fair amount of their well-trodden ground—the Stephens in Hyde Park Gate, for example, or the Apostles and *Principia Ethica*. Of the Cambridge Conversations Society we are pleased to hear on one page that in 1959 they resolved that no change would be made about the basic principle of secrecy, yet on turning the page we are treated to Sir Dennis

Proctor's apostolic testimony of 1970, when he told the society that "Virginia Woolf was one of the most quotable men there have ever been, and he continued so to the very end of his long life".

It is Leonard who dominates *A Marriage of True Minds*. The account of Virginia is largely a biographical and critical *compte rendu* with little new information. Leonard Woolf is of course best known from his distinguished five-volume autobiography, and Mr Spater and Mr Parsons give us a much more objective view, taking his career as a whole in which even his service in Ceylon is seen that of an Apostle in *partibus terrarum*. Late in life, one of his Rodmell neighbours wrote to him that in the Middle Ages he "could well have been a Prior of Lewes Priory, of somewhat unworthodox views but a capable and vigorous administrator of his estates, lands and interests". They might see him as something of a religious man in spite of a firm rationalism which led to his being so intolerant of religious feeling and practices and led too, one might add, to a preoccupation with the scientific of his creed. All this was part of the stubbornness for which Leonard Woolf was notorious, and which here leads his biographers into a rather defensive obituarist's about the basic principle of secrecy, yet on turning the page we are treated to Sir Dennis

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The unstuttering pen

By Arthur Calder-Marshall

ANTHONY CURTIS:

Somerset Maugham
716pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£6.50.

The only time I ever saw Somerset Maugham in the noble rooms of the Royal Society of Literature in Hyde Park Gardens. The occasion was the presentation of awards by Lord Butler. To be made a Companion of Literature is the highest honour. But since the number is limited, the companions are usually aged, and often too infirm to be present in person. The poet laureate, John Masefield, received his certificate by proxy: and I imagined that Maugham, four years his senior, would do the same. Certainly there was no sign of him among the throng. But when Lord Butler called his name, there was a stirring in the crowd. I found myself nudged on one side by a figure, in stature like a young schoolboy, but with the fascinatingly wrinkled features of the *maître*. He came and stood beneath the dais on which stood our president, bowing before him much as the Reverend Thomas Field must have bowed when he presented young Willie Maugham with beautifully bound and badly printed prizes, stamped with the arms of King's School, Canterbury. The old man looked at Lord Butler's magnificent address and when the applause for that had ended, we waited for a reply.

"If I had known that I would be expected to make a speech, I would have spent hours devising an... impromptu." There was a ripple of laughter. "All I could say is that I was as fit as a hand had grasped Maugham's throat and was throttling him. Butler thrust the scroll into Maugham's hand. There was a burst of applause and the great writer escaped from view. Situations repeat. Curtis writes of Maugham's entering a senior school at King's Canterbury: "He never forgot the moment when he suffered a total verbal paralysis while constraining Latin in front of the irrepressible and B. Gordon who yelled at him: 'Speak, you blockhead, speak!'"

There was in fact an experience still more traumatic when Willie Maugham entered the junior school, which Maugham recounted in Chapter 35 of *The Summing Up*. The stammer—occasionally by wit? his mother's death when he was six? his father's when he was eight? antipathy to the clerical uncle and his wife who took him over after their deaths? became a torment when he was ragged at boarding school. Willie asked his uncle if it was really true that if you had faith, you could move mountains. The

Vicar of Whitstable assured him that it was literally true, and that evening at the end of the holidays Willie went down on his knees and prayed that God would remove his stammer. His faith was shattered when he found next morning that he stammered as badly as ever.

Yet curiously his prayer, in a literary context, was answered. When *The Summing Up* was published, Christopher Maresden asked Maugham to record for the BBC World Service a 45-minute programme which I selected. He expected that there would be appalling editing difficulties to eliminate stammers. But Maugham went in and recorded the whole programme without even a "fluff".

Without the stammer, he might have dispensed his wonderful talent, purely as a raconteur. Good conversationalists are often bad writers, just as good writers are often bad conversationalists. Maugham's style, from a literary point of view, was slack and ridden with clichés. But it was as compelling as the Ancient Mariner's. He had to write in order to speak; and because he wanted to speak, he could not write other than the way he did.

In my twenties the critics said I was brutal," he observed, "in my thirties they said I was flippant, in my forties they said I was cynical, in my fifties they said I was competent, and now in my sixties they say I am superficial." In his seventies, the critics said he was marvellous. In his eighties, when he published his vile denunciation of his wife Sylvia in the *Sunday Express* and *Show* for £100,000 and his estate went into liquidation, he said he was mad; and in his nineties, even Maugham himself realized it.

But all the time, he went on writing: it was as necessary to life as breathing. Fabulously wealthy, he was haunted by the vast sums he had to pay out in taxes. When the suggestion was made that he could ease his tax burden by a deed of gift to his daughter, he answered: "Haven't you read *King Lear*?"

Vast though his output was, he never touched upon what was central to his life, his homosexuality. Like E. M. Forster, he had grown up in the shadow of Oscar Wilde's trial and condemnation. Maugham, the man was doubly hidden: by Maugham the narrator who was manipulated by Maugham the writer. This proved his strength as a storyteller and his weakness as a literary artist. His magic was legendariness.

Anthony Curtis has already written a critical study called *The Pattern of Maugham*. Since then he feels he has acquired "a deeper understanding of his personality" which he has "tried now to communicate to the reader with the aid of period illustrations". Of these the best are by Gerald Kelly, portrait of Maugham as a dandy with a brown top hat and a snap of young J. B. Priestley in flannel bags

with portly Hugh Walpole in plus-fours, with the caption: "We've got to convince Hugh that it isn't him, but that it's John Drinkwater." There are many other pictures of Maugham and the Villa Mauresque. But views of Nuana Avenue, Honolulu, in the early twentieth century or the Rue du la Petite Pologne, Papeete, "at the time Maugham was there" are mere space fillers for a run-of-the-mill picture book.

Though Mr Curtis may have widened his understanding of Maugham, he has not widened mine. After a careful opening, the style degenerates into clichés—"initial approach", "rather lukewarm", "completely absorbed", "richly eccentric", "in the face of life".

Tuberculosis "was to afflict Willie when he was first married" (with the implication that he was married more than once). "When he returned to Paris in his youth he was in the company of Romaine, sometimes in the company of Romaine, sometimes in the company of Romaine. How could Maugham Acton, born 1904, go to the theatre in the youth of Maugham, born 1874? Is Marcel Schwob (page 69) Marcel Schwob? On page 27 there is a reference to "the Thousand and One Nights" translated by "Lane Poole" on page 58 "The Thousand and One Nights had led him to Lane-Poole's *The Moors in Spain*..." The standard translation of the Arabian Nights was by W. Lane in 1841, and edited by E. S. Ross in 1885; not by either Reginald Lane Poole or Stanley Lane-Poole. There is no "e" in Laurence Housman's surname and Lady Hamilton's house was called Merton Place, not Merton Abbey.

Mr Curtis has drawn material from books by and about Somerset Maugham. His only contribution is the fancy that during his waking hours at Whitstable, Willie was confined to the dining-room where like Jane Eyre and other nineteenth-century orphans, he would curl up with a book and read satisfying hours he would banish present miseries through a sustained use of the imagination. His authority for this is a note written by Maugham inside one of his own books, in which he says: "I was in the room of the Old Vicarage at Whitstable where I spent all my holidays when I was at school. In this room I had my first lessons at Whist... It is not more likely that Maugham was, as saying all his holidays were spent at the Old Vicarage, rather than just in his dining-room?"

In *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* (340pp, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), Professor Donald Pizer, of Newcomb College, Tulane University, has gathered together essays, reviews and miscellaneous journalism so as to reflect in one volume the wide range of Dreiser's interests and ideas and their development during a writing life extending from 1892 to 1945.

With reverent gaze

By Peter Conrad

JONATHAN FRYER:

Islerwood
A Biography of Christopher Isherwood
300pp. New English Library. £7.50.

Isherwood needs critics, not biographers. He has after all been writing his own biography for the past fifty years: a biography, not an autobiography, for he claims none of the autobiographer's privileges of intimacy, and has always insisted, like a perplexed biographer unfathomable an elusive subject, that he does not know enough about himself, and writes in the hope of learning more.

He is not well served by Jonathan Fryer's life, which is content to paraphrase Isherwood's own published accounts of events with the addition of a few laudatory anecdotes—Isherwood hiding from Garbo under a table, Isherwood's spat with John Rechy, the meeting with Don Bachardy. For Fryer, Isherwood is less an artist than a cult hero: a preface describes how the adolescent biographer-to-be discovered Isherwood after a politico-spiritual pilgrimage to Vietnam in 1969, which stimulated in him a desire for the East. Fryer learnt the biographer's craft at the *Profile* Desk of Reuters's news agency where, like Californians making "before-and-after" reservations at Forest Lawn, he was set to prepare obituaries for a bizarre list of "Oriental, artistic or literary figures such as Kuo Mo-yu, Kang Sheng, Pierre Boulez, Hans Werner Henze, Daphne du Maurier, Gore Vidal and Christopher Isherwood".

Fryer owes his style to Pinter's too: the insensitive inflationary pomp which makes him announce the death of Isherwood's father as "a tragedy of irreparable importance", or the slovenly reversion to inapposite cliché which declares, of "Sally Boyles", that "the reader glides through the story like a breeze, breathing of the breeze". Fryer seems more adept at handling books than at reading them; bemused, perhaps, by Isherwood's identification of himself with a camera, he distinguishes between the man's works mainly according to the number of photographs they contain. For instance, on *The Conductor and the Cows*: "The English edition... had ninety-four photographs by Caskey, whereas the American edition... only had thirty-six"; *Kathleen and Frank* "was a long book, illustrated with several charming photographs (fewer in the British than the American edition), and deliberately without an index"; *Christopher*

and *His Kind*, however, self-deceptively "included neither photographs nor an index".

Some material of critical interest, concerning Isherwood's hesitations and alterations of emphasis while forming his works, lies abandoned in Fryer's book. Isherwood creates it seems, by self-rejection, he sheds selves in his books: the uncloseted "Christopher" of his later memoir dismisses the evasive "Her Issywood" of the Berlin stories, and both of them scourge their creator, who invents these personae not in egotistical self-indulgence but in dispute and disavowal his own troublesome, unfocused identity. His books, it now seems, are made of a stilling process of self-denial on which then emerges from the wreckage of another work which he has sloughed off as unworthy. The Berlin stories are fragments from a lapsed epic, *The Lost; A Single Man* struggled on from inside a work called *An Englishman* and *His Kind* emerged from a work called *Down There on a Visit* derives from a novel about exile in Mexico which Isherwood expressed, salvaging only the title. Even the biography of Ramsay Krishna follows the same logic, and can only separate itself from its creator after a false start and a ritual self-rejection. Isherwood began "with a long introduction, explaining his own personal involvement with Vedanta, but then realized that this gave the book a thrust away from his own life, and appeared as a separate booklet, *An Approach to Vedanta* (1963). The completion of the biography was deferred for several years".

Having told the truth about himself in memoirs, Isherwood turns, impelled by the same penitential need to free himself by self-negation, to amend the record and atone for his perjuries, rewriting *Lions and Shadows* as *Christopher and His Kind*, or dismissing *Mr Norris Changes Traits* as repulsively heartless in his introduction to Gerald Hamilton's *Mr Norris and I*. He specializes in self-deception, and can be found lying on his back, boasting of the badness of *The World as I See It*; yet, although these self-repudiations are gestures of self-reconciliation required by Isherwood's Vedantic philosophy, they are also curiously self-admiring: self-criticism is the most ostentatious of luxuries, which only the invincible egotist can afford. In its entanglement of opposite motives, the mystic's contempt for the self and the novelist's fetishistic exploration of the self's shabby trickery, Isherwood's is a fascinating literary personality. But, though he told Fryer he hoped there would be shocks aplenty in this biography, he will learn from it nothing about himself that he doesn't know already.

LESLIE HOTSON:

Shakespeare by Hilliard
210pp. Chatto and Windus. £6.50.

The young man—perhaps in his mid-twenties, maybe a trifle older—is richly but not gaudily dressed. An unostentatious collar of lace cut-work lies flat on his sober slashed doublet. He wears a sugar-loaf beaver ornamented with a feathered branch and jewelled band. His upturned right hand clasps a left (it looks more female than male) strangely issuing from a bank of clouds. The hands have an unearthly white pallor, contrasting with the lively flesh tones of the sitter's face and neck. His auburn hair caresses the hat brim in curly ringlets; he sports a neat beard and full moustaches. The wide eyes arrest our own, suggesting mysterious recesses of thought. In all, he cuts a handsome aristocratic figure, this young sinner, Leslie Hotson, as the title of his new book proclaims, is persuaded that he is William Shakespeare. Could this indeed be Shakespeare of Warwickshire, aged twenty-four, son of the deceased former bailiff of Stratford? With some effort we remind ourselves that this nobleness does not necessarily presuppose bluntness of blood.

Nicholas Hilliard, portrait painter par excellence to the court of Queen Elizabeth I, executed the oval miniature in the Armada year. So much we know because he inscribed "Anno Domini 1588" in gold letters against the blue backdrop. He also included, between the clasped hands and his subject's face, a puzzling motto: *Ad maiorem gloriam*, which has in the past been translated, none too confidently, as "And therefore of Attic love". Whatever does the phrase mean? In catalogues the portrait is entitled "Unknown man, standing: a Head issuing from a Cloud".

The miniature exists in two versions, almost, but not quite, identical. One is on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The other, in better preservation and if anything more exquisite (so far as one may judge from the excellent colour reproduction) in former times adorned the collection at Castle Howard in Yorkshire. Today it belongs to Dr Hotson who bought it in 1961 from a private collector. He tells us that it cost him more than he could well afford, but I doubt that he has regretted his extravagance for one moment. The picture has haunted him, "exciting" (as he says, quoting Samuel Johnson) "restless and unquenchable curiosity" as it impels him to devote years of search for the meaning of its unique features in the light of his own time. *Shakespeare by Hilliard* relates his attempt at exorcism.

The narrative unfolds absorbingly, as Dr Hotson pursues his quarry. With easy familiarity he ranges over Renaissance literature and art (both English and Continental), mythology, heraldry, and custom, as well as the resources of modern scholarship. His memory never lets him down, his pace never flags. In a field where so much of the secondary literature is colourlessly specialist, he writes with an assurance and panache that invite the engagement of ordinary readers. The book brings with it the excitement of a hunt, and the author has lately celebrated his eightieth birthday.

Dr Hotson has been hailed as "the Margaret of the literary world", and clearly he enjoys thinking of himself as a detective: his text is spiced with references to Sherlock Holmes, the CID, *Fabian of the Yard*, and the like. Dr Hotson is entitled to see himself in this light. While still in his twenties he published his celebrated account of the circumstances leading up to the violent death of Christopher Marlowe in party company at Deptford on a spring day in 1593.

The discovery made his reputation. No one was allowed to forget that the little is the "mercenary finger". Dr Hotson makes much of the fact that this digit is represented on the others clutching Apollo's index finger: "Shakespeare's finger" is even more prominently paraded from the others, a fact

In Mercurial guise

By S. Schoenbaum

understanding of the peripheral figures around Shakespeare. Thomas Russell, for example, one of the two overseers of the dramatist's will; or William Johnson, host of the Mermaid, who participated with him in a property purchase in Blackfriars. For his many contributions we owe Dr Hotson a great debt of gratitude.

In recent years he has diverted his incomparable investigative gift into more controversial pursuits: new arguments about the first night of *Twelfth Night*, Elizabethan staging, the dating and chronology of the Sonnets. Unlike the earlier discoveries, these suggestions derive their force from interpretation and novel applications of Hotson's wide-ranging knowledge of the Elizabethan age. Thus the eclipse of the "mortal moon" in Sonnet 137 alludes to the defeat of the crescent-formationed Spanish Armada, and therefore helps to date the cycle. While these courtly debates have by and large met with a sceptical reception once the dust has settled, a document naming Shakespeare is one thing; analogies and inferences are something else. *Shakespeare by Hilliard* belongs in this latter category.

Dr Hotson's initial premise is that the mode of his miniature is allegorical. If *The Faerie Queene* embodies a "rich conceit" of Hilliard portrait enters us with a brightly coloured one, depicting a more forgotten language of visual symbolism in which every detail of costume, ornament, and gesture contributes to a hidden, yet recoverable, meaning that is completed (as in the manner of the *impresa*) by the accompanying motto. Not all portraits of the period are allegorical, but in this one the presence of the hand issuing from the clouds by itself sufficiently indicates the genre. So the "mercenary" makes perfectly good sense.

The task, as Dr Hotson stresses in his first chapter, is to see the picture as an Elizabethan would. Of course we are not Elizabethans and so cannot truly see with their eyes, any more than we can truly recreate the Globe Theatre. We must settle for approximations. Moreover, that familiar fiction of the historian, the "Elizabethan", these days arouses deserved mistrust; no two Elizabethans perceive their world with precisely the same eyes. As regards paintings, we do well to bear in mind that forms, like words, harbour alternative significances, and more than one key may seemingly unlock the cabinet of thought. Besides, the essentials of many, if not most, of the imperatives of allegory, doctate the presence of certain elements of design: a foot will have five toes whether or not the artist is playing numerological games. So, while the elucidator's endeavour may be well enough, he will never possibly seek external validation of his interpretative findings.

Dr Hotson's revelations, if not his complex arguments, may be briefly summarized. He concludes that the sitter represents Mercury. The superior god issuing from the clouds is Apollo, and the inscription is to be translated "Athenians because of love". (Citing Sir Frank Adcock, he argues that the phrase cannot mean "Because of Attic love", or the like, Attic being a nominative plural and not a genitive singular.) The Athenians are humans in divine guises: Apollo is to be identified as one William Hatcliffe, a Lincolnshire man who reigned as Prince of Purpoole (equated with Delphic Apollo) at the Gray's Inn Christmas revels of 1587/8. Mercury is Shakespeare.

In identifying Apollo, Dr Hotson performs a remarkable feat without quite disarming our consciousness of the meagreness of the iconographical details—a hand, a ruff-cut, and some clouds—he has to work with. For Mercury he produces more voluminous evidence, most of it persuasive. Noting that the little is the "mercenary finger", Dr Hotson makes much of the fact that this digit is represented on the others clutching Apollo's index finger: "Shakespeare's finger" is even more prominently paraded from the others, a fact

which does not interest Dr Hotson until much later, when he remarks that this finger signifies Apollo. On the basis of such reasoning, the hand, with its Mercurial and Apollonian fingers, could belong to either deity. Or neither.

Mercury is associated with the number four, so that and its multiples must be remorselessly hunted down. (Apollo's number, seven, is denoted by the seven clouds from which his hand emerges, but in the damaged *V* and a miniature counted only six with the case being out that day—and I am not convinced that there were ever seven.) The year Hilliard inscribed on the picture, 1588, is a multiple of four. Dr Hotson states, as though it were fact, "Had the date been 1587 or 1589, he would have left it out". Why? Hilliard often, though not invariably, dates his portraits: examples are the self-portrait of 1577 and his miniature of Elizabeth I (1572), an unknown man (1572), the Earl of Leicester (1576), and Sir Henry Slingsby (1595). An artist's impulse to put a date on his work is completely alien to other terms than those of numerical symbolism. All in all, however, even while his method stirs apprehensions, Dr Hotson makes a sufficiently provocative case for Mercury in the picture and to a lesser extent, for Apollo's presence, too. He has the field to himself, for nobody has ever advanced a competing interpretation.

But is the slither Shakespeare? To that question all others lead. Dr Hotson himself is not given to doubt. All through he employs the vocabulary of confidence: such words as "demonstrably", "unmistakable", "conclusive", and "infallibly" exert a pressure difficult to resist. But arm yourself with the Hilliard miniature, and all ubiquitous Dorothea anguishing (on an authenticated likeness), buttonhole an innocent bystander, and say, "Look here upon this picture and on this," and the odds are that he will agree with you.

Dr Hotson must somehow show that Shakespeare was popularly associated with Mercury. He points to Thomas Freeman's eulogy, in 1614, of "Shakespeare, that nimble Mercury", and the allusions to Shakespeare as both Apollo and Mercury in Jonson's celebrated tribute. But mostly Dr Hotson must by inductive means find directions out, and the inductions tend to be very indirect. Mercury has many attributes. He is, as we are reminded, poet, courtier, butler, teacher, companion, and manager of mirth; he is gentle, sweet, and a double-dealer. It therefore follows that when anybody identifies Shakespeare with any of these characteristics, he is thinking of Mercury. All those allusions to gentle Shakespeare recall his Mercurial guise. In *Elizabetan* Milton describes Shakespeare as "one whom we well know was the closest companion of Castles" in his prison solitude—thus showing that Milton viewed Shakespeare as companionable Mercury. Nor all readers will find Mercury in these passages, and we tend to lose sight of the fact that Hilliard painted his miniature in 1588.

Other recalcitrant problems intrude. Although Hilliard himself fought a losing battle with insolvency in his Gutter Lane house-run-and-undo, he catered for the "beautiful people" of his day, especially the circle clustering round Leicester. Portrait-painting, he firmly believed, was not for the hol polloi. As he tells

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The straitjacket of gender

By Randolph Quirk

CASEY MILLER and KATE SWIFT:
Words and Women
New Language in New Times
196pp. Gollancz. £4.50.

There are plenty of fair-minded well-intentioned folk who believe that the issue of women's rights concerns political franchise, equal pay, job opportunity, and certain marital issues. All else is irrelevant. The authors of *Words and Women* are not of this mind. Casey Miller and Kate Swift are to show rather convincingly that this is not so. The words we have traditionally used to refer to humanity ("man" is mortal). "Each member must signify his date of birth" tend to imply—if not actually reflect—a belief in the male as norm. The same is true for androcentric reference within several major religions ("Father" "Son"), family history in terms of patrilineal descent, and so on, and so on. It may be fashionable, even rational, to dismiss feminist objections as trivial, pedantic and narrowly literal. Any reasonable person knows, it is said, that the masculine forms are merely a hypocritical convenience (the "man embraces woman" chestnut) and that "God the Father" is no less metaphorical than "Mother Earth".

And in a way the reasonable person is right. Many (most?) languages apply the "marked" and "unmarked" principle both to subsume female within male and to show by a positive affix that the female is some sort of special case. One can ignore the sex of the dog that bit you, using *dog*, but bitch is explicitly female (as explicitly, of course, when applied to canines). The habit of identifying the female in terms of the male and making her explicitly derivative, Eve-like, is shown by endings in *hoyage*, *German Studentin*, *Polish Point*, *Italian Signora*, or prefatory markers in *woman* and (through significant popular etymology) in *female* itself.

But the widespread existence of such phenomena does not ipso facto make them unobjectionable. Teacher explains the characteristics of teenage men and a timid little girl in the front row asks "Did they have women in those days?" Another writes for an authoritative ruling: "Dear God, Are boys better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair." Are these to be

dismissed as just mildly amusing examples of children's misconceptions, like Gladly being the name of a cross-eyed bear?

The authors of *Words and Women* marshal an impressive body of evidence suggesting that such things are to be taken very seriously indeed. Psychological testing has shown that, even where generic use is theoretically unquestionable, people—women included—tend to form male rather than female mental images for all the nouns in sentences like "The dog is man's friend". And the inclination to "think male" was dramatically illustrated by the American Heritage computer analysis of five million words from the school books used by young children. There turned out to be twice as many allusions to boys as to girls, and seven times more allusions to men than to women.

Such "demographic improbability" (as the authors nicely put it) is bad enough, but what they feel is more damaging is the sex-stereotyping that accompanies such allusions. Men are brave, inventive, independent; boys are mainly and adventurously. Womanliness, by contrast, connotes none of these things, and the analogous flatteries are subtly demeaning: girls are sweet, pretty, gentle, tenderhearted; women are their best devotedly loyal to their menfolk.

No wonder the diminutives taken to correspond to *brother* and *sister* have become encrusted with such sharply different values: what little boy would want a *sissy* as a bud? The upshot is not just an abiding feeling among girls that they are second-class humans but a correspondingly oppressive feeling among males that certain personalities (like the urge to weep in joy or grief) would be a betrayal of their preordained nature.

So far so good. Where Miller and Swift (as I am sure they would wish me to refer to them) are on slinkier ground is in their attempt to ascribe a cause for all this "sexist" male-orientation. There is some quite justifiable vacillation, but on the whole they unambiguously favour a Whorfian hypothesis, making us all the helpless victims of our language—and they seem to mean "our" language, as in a language which now has been brought together, after revision, into book form. The pattern of not unkindly proscriptionism that emerges places the author in the first rank of writers able to give guidance to those—virtually the whole population of educated people—who, in all sorts of expected and unexpected ways, feel short of certainty about the way in which the English language operates, or should operate. It is not a comforting work, and Mr. Howard is no Fowler. As J. W. Fowler cruised into many areas—grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and so on—not yet explored by Mr. Howard, but *New Words for Old*, nevertheless, is a reasonable ship off the *Modern English Usage* block. We are conducted with wit and fastidious care through the bright glades of some of the quickly grown timber of our day—charisma, consensus, intuition, parameter, exterior, and the rest—something of interest and value emerges in every article.

Since the 1920s at least linguistic scholarship has veered sharply towards descriptivism and the advances of understanding because of this change of direction are well known. But educated people (and in the present context a BA degree is a convenient benchmark of "education"), while well grounded in many things, obstinately continue to suffer from the minor in-

comparable phenomena in other languages, and it is likely that virtually all the complaints levelled against English could be paralleled, item by item, in a host of other languages, cognate or exotic. Nor is there any good reason to suppose that the answer lies in Whorf's rather exaggerated extension of Sapir's suggestion (1928) about the "real world" being "unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group". Of course there is a sense in which a language can make up all Christians ("See you at Christmas"), nor to mention simultaneously covert pagans ("See you at Easter"), flat-out earthiness ("See you at sundown"), with a crazy sense of motion and rhythm, or a cold weather is approaching now that we have left September behind). But how far such metaphors skew our thinking rather than conveniently or conventionally represent it is another matter entirely.

In any case, so far as the position of women is concerned, Miller and Swift are clearly aware of biological, historical and social factors that account for the inequalities and injustices, the demeanings and the misconceptions. English (as well as other languages) merely provides a faithful reflection of these, as a language which is no more responsible for the meaning and use of *sissy* than it is for our attitude to cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers.

Well obviously if I believe the cause to lie outside language, this means that I am sceptical as to whether a cure can lie within it. Miller and Swift are not. Rather than insisting on educational processes to instil the fundamental unity of humankind (e.g. with school stories making the not implausible claim that fear and bravery are the lot equally of men and women), they put their money on language reform, the enable one to avoid sex discrimination.

The charisma of novelty

By R. W. Burchfield

PHILIP HOWARD:
New Words for Old
A Survey of Misused, Vogue and Cliché Words
127pp. Hamish Hamilton. £3.95.

The centre page of *The Times*, a regular parade ground for sundry politicians, diarists, sportsmen, and men of letters, has for the past two years carried a series of "occasional articles" on words written by Philip Howard. These engaging pieces, each a gem of observation and sagacity, have now been brought together, after revision, into book form. The pattern of not unkindly proscriptionism that emerges places the author in the first rank of writers able to give guidance to those—virtually the whole population of educated people—who, in all sorts of expected and unexpected ways, feel short of certainty about the way in which the English language operates, or should operate. It is not a comforting work, and Mr. Howard is no Fowler. As J. W. Fowler cruised into many areas—grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and so on—not yet explored by Mr. Howard, but *New Words for Old*, nevertheless, is a reasonable ship off the *Modern English Usage* block. We are conducted with wit and fastidious care through the bright glades of some of the quickly grown timber of our day—charisma, consensus, intuition, parameter, exterior, and the rest—something of interest and value emerges in every article.

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the women's movement is committed to destroying. But insisting that women have been forced to adopt a dependent role (in an extraordinary, jolly while a range of societies) without raising the question of whether they chose to adopt it, does not help to remove all trace of honest doubt as to whether such roles are sex dependent rather than socially constrained.

Miller and Swift make no pretence of being learned. Their authorities are the public press, radio and television, supplemented—largely by rather popular writings of psychologists, sociologists, and linguists. Their grasp of technical, theoretical and historical matters is not surprisingly insecure. Their writing is repetitious, a bit flippant, excessively concerned with the blue vein in man's allusion to woman, and above all of course unequivocally partisan. But the handle polemics with a pleasing use of often witty urbanity, having none of the graceless truculence that characterizes much "antibastard" writing where one seems to be confronted by misandrous (and perhaps androgynous) women merely kicking against the pricks.

In consequence they have produced a book which could be influential and which might genuinely help the cause they have at heart. It certainly—even at this popular level—opens up many important questions that invite serious thought and research.

Women's usage needs to be considered more positively, for example, free so far as possible from preconception that its characteristics are conditioned by icons of male dominance. The work of such scholars as Jerome Bruner (who is not mentioned) suggests that many features of women's speech are directly related to their role of transmitting language to the next generation. Thus, to take but one example mentioned by Miller and Swift (following Robin Lakoff), the tendency to speak in a questioning style could be seen, not as indicating socially induced insecurity, but as part of the response-stimulation technique which Bruner would claim as a major strategy in mother-child interaction.

The summer of the Spitfire

By Noble Frankland

LEN DEIGHTON:
Fighter
The True Story of the Battle of Britain
304pp. Cape. £4.95.

With *Fighter: The True Story of the Battle of Britain*, Len Deighton soars from the realm of fantasy, which have previously absorbed his agile pen and vast readership, into those of history. No doubt he has been encouraged by the truth of the aphorism that fact is stranger, or more fantastic, than fiction. Certainly, as he tells us, he has been particularly urged in this direction by A. J. F. Taylor and Albert Speer.

This last point, especially as Mr Deighton stresses it, is worth a thought. For any aspirant seeking conversion from fantasy to history in the field of air power it is hard to think of any two less promising mentors than Mr Taylor and Dr Speer. The former, as ever capable of mastering the dramatic essentials of any situation, contributes an introduction of characteristic brilliance which, like the lectures and table talk of that wonderful man, takes one's breath away. Alas, when one has recovered it, one sees how history has been sacrificed to drama. "The British", Mr Taylor tells us, "bombed defenceless villages in Iraq; the Italians bombed defenceless villages in Abyssinia; the Germans bombed defenceless villages in Spain; the Japanese bombed defenceless cities in China." Does Mr Taylor really think that Barcelona and Madrid were defenceless villages? Of course he does not, but his sentence would be split if he remembered the fact.

Again, he has seen the irony of Sir Thomas Inskip's extraordinary intervention in the changing of priorities between bomber and fighter production in 1938 (and I, incidentally, know from where he gleaned the point). Nevertheless, he cannot help exaggerating it. It was not Inskip versus the Air Marshals; it was the Treasury versus the Air estimates—an altogether more subtle and less dramatically explicable circumstance.

And, of course, we get the usual Beaverbrook rubric, this time the inference being that he played, if not the, at least a major role in the victory of the Battle of Britain. Unfortunately, this is a point on

to which Mr Deighton cottons with enthusiasm. The index shows ten references to Lord Beaverbrook and one to Sir Henry Tizard, about which more anon. Perhaps, in fact, Lord Beaverbrook's salient contribution to the battle was the production of his son Max Aitken, one of the bravest and most brilliant of our most brave and brilliant fighter pilots. Beaverbrook's production priorities for Spitfires and his ruthless unorthodox enforcement of them and all that, only really bit after the Battle of Britain was over. They resulted chiefly in the fact that by 1943 the metropolitan Royal Air Force had 4,000 of these magnificent but very short range interceptors in its front line which, as the Chief of the American Army Air Forces, General Arnold, rightly pointed out, could play with little part in an air war which had shifted beyond the White Cliffs of Dover.

This, in a sentence or two, is why the Battle of Britain must rank directly with Drake's defeat of the Armada and, though less directly, with Nelson's victory at Trafalgar, as being among the handful of decisive battles in British history.

As to how the battle was fought and won, the book, though not without considerable merit and at times excitement, is somewhat less satisfactory. Mr Deighton delights in exploring the technicalities of war, and this indeed is worth doing, for technicalities dictate tactics and tactics dictate strategies. The trouble is that in this "history" the author is almost as prone to get his technicalities wrong as he was in his novel *Bomber*. In the latter he imposed a

late 1960s view of class, with which he tends to be over-precoccupied, upon a 1940s context and he made a hash of explaining bomber radar. Now in his historical *Fighter* he commits more errors. How on earth could "Sailor" Malan, however much he may have wished to do so, have deliberately mortally wounded enemy bomber crews and maimed the aircraft enough for them to limp home with their morale-depressing contents; instead of cleanly shooting them down?

Such a blamish pales, however, beside one glaring fault: in this study, Sir Henry Tizard is mentioned once and then only in connection with the barren conception of a "death ray" to stop the engines of German bombers. Blackett and Wimperley are mentioned at all. Ronald Clark's *Tizard* does not appear in Mr Deighton's rather scanty bibliography. All, or nearly all, the credit for the introduction of operational radar into the air battle is given to Watson Watt, whose greatness as a scientist

was not too distant from being written.

In fact, of course, as Mr Deighton points out, nearly everyone knew about radar; but in 1940 only one battle formation had an operational expression of radar which enabled decisive tactics to be based upon it—this was the Royal Air Force Fighter Command. The main reason for that was Sir Henry Tizard, his particular genius and not least his particular personality and past experience. The only civilian ever virtually to have commanded an RAF squadron, which he did while the techniques of radar control were evolved, Sir Henry remains today the only scientist of whom it may justly be said that he did more than any other individual to achieve victory in a decisive battle. Perhaps in a second edition Mr Deighton will pick up this point. Its inclusion, together with some technical correction, could yet produce the best book on the Battle of Britain so far written.

Greyhounds with teeth

By Bryan Ranft

COLIN SIMPSON:
The Ship that Hunted Itself
207pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £5.25.

During the thirty years before 1914 British naval policy-makers became increasingly concerned about the vulnerability of the country's merchant marine in a future war. Britain was literally dependent for survival on imported food and industrial raw materials, and with a merchant shipping tonnage exceeding that of all the other major maritime powers combined, disaster over the world's oceans, the task of protection was both critical and seemingly impossible. France with her naval bases near the main trade routes and her predilection for the *guerre de course* as the most effective strategy in the face of general naval supremacy, had presented an alarming threat until the outbreak of 1904. The new potential enemy, Germany, seemed much less of a menace. She had very few cruisers deployed outside European waters and no naval bases capable

of supporting sustained operations against merchant shipping. The use of the submarine in this type of warfare was scarcely foreseen in either Britain or Germany, but the Admiralty was very apprehensive of the damage which could be done in distant oceans by fast passenger liners converted into auxiliary cruisers. Germany did indeed use such vessels and Colin Simpson's *The Ship that Hunted Itself* deals with the clash between one of them, the Hamburg South America Line's *Cap Trafalgar*, and a British counterpart, the Cunard's *Carmania*. By a remarkable coincidence each ship disguised itself so as to resemble the other, hence his title.

He has written a cleverly designed parallel narrative of the fortunes of the two ships, from their first conversion into warships until their chance encounter in the South Atlantic which ended in the sinking of the German raider before she had claimed any victim among British merchantmen. Against a background sketch of the general naval situation in the South Atlantic at the beginning of the war he concentrates on detailed descriptions of the ingenious displays in turning the two floating hotels into effective fighting ships and an even more fasci-

nating analysis of the personal and professional relationships between the two sets of merchant officers and the regular naval officers who took over command of their ships.

It is a good story and well told, but quite impossible to assess for accuracy of detail because there is no satisfactory account of the sources that have been consulted, let alone any detailed references to validate the apparently verbatim reports of the discussions between the groups of officers, and indeed of their personal thoughts, which feature so largely. There is neither a map nor an index, and there are enough inaccuracies to diminish confidence in Mr Simpson's knowledge of naval history. Nelson's eye was damaged in Corsica not Malta. The *Sachsenhorst* and *Gneisenau* were respectively a cruiser and an armoured cruiser and not battle cruisers. The British battle cruiser *Invincible* was not "scouring the South Atlantic" for German cruisers in August 1914. She was sent there until November, after the British defeat at Coronel. But these are minor points compared with the failure to recognize that the provision of information on sources is not a matter of formal pedantry but essential if a book like this is to have any credibility.

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TLS Commentary

Foreign poetry? Yes!

If you had to describe to a Frenchman the current state of British poetry, what would you say? And which poets would you name to give evidence of genuine achievement? Lee Harvey, whose task it was at the first Anglo-French Poetry Translation Conference, held last week at the ICA, to provide "stings and slings", had no doubt that despite the ever-present threat of "repressive forces in the arts" a "great range of exciting poetry" is being written in Britain now, and recommended the work of twenty poets including Ian Hamilton Finlay, Roy Fisher, Jeremy Prynne and Tom Raworth. Lee Harvey's list of names brought protest from the floor, for Finlay and others offering alternative lists of talented poets and suggesting that an unannounced bias towards those who have followed the precepts of Charles Olson underlay Lee Harvey's list. The French visitors looked a bit puzzled; one said that he was not in any case interested in names.

This was not the only occasion during the conference when cultural gaps appeared. French bafflement over the range and rivalry that seems to beset our discussions of poetry was matched by British bafflement, in some quarters at least, over the manner in which Bernard Noël assessed the situation of contemporary French poetry. For while M. Noël did give some indication of recent developments, the bulk of his paper was devoted to the kind of musing on the ontological status of the poetic text—"The words are in themselves only words, but this assemblage [the text] is a virtual 'mind', the trace of a move already made."—which the British find rather unfamiliar. Another divide was evident when M. Noël and another French contributor spoke of the completed literary text in terms of death, a metaphor which does not come readily to British critics still influenced by Lawrentian and Lacanian conceptions of the text as living organism.

There were, however, a number of matters on which it was possible to share experiences. It seems clear, for instance, that in the area of publishing the poets of France and Britain have similar problems. Distortion of the text, rising production costs and the reluctance of reputable publishers to risk taking on new poets have meant that many authors in both countries have come to rely increasingly on the smaller presses for dissemination of their work. There was shared criticism, too, of a situation in which the Larkin principle—"Foreign poetry? No!" as he once said in an interview—has come to prevail.

Fifty years on...

Margaret Kennedy's *Red Sky at Morning*, her first novel since *The Cornet* (1927), was the subject of the lead novel review in the TLS, October 27, 1927; it was, the reviewer said, "an extremely interesting book, full of felicities, full of humanity". The second review was of Compton Mackenzie's *Vestal Fire*.

Mr Compton Mackenzie's mood now is not the same for two books together. In *Vestal Fire* he seems a man writing to amuse himself, inconsequent when he wants to be, discursive when he feels inclined, witty and all the time gently and lightly satirical. The place, an island, the people, the people, an odd cosmopolitan collection, the angle from which Mr Mackenzie approaches them immediately bring Mr Norman Douglas's *Souls* and *Wind* into the reader's mind; but Mr Mackenzie is more determined, more fully done, something to be bashed from the author's mind as soon as the last self-satisfying word is written.

The third novel was Mary Borden's *Flemings*.

There is an atmosphere of enormous uproar and speed in Mary Borden's new novel; so much so that the dazed reader is glad to shut the book from time to time and find himself in a quiet room far from the skyscrapers, the blinding lights and the gigantic machinery

In France Auden's work appeared in translation only this year; in England, so Paul Buck claimed, the Arts Council, far from being the indiscriminating doler-out of subsidies depicted by Roy Fuller, does hardly anything to help little magazines with an international flavour.

Discussion of translation provided further common ground and papers by Keith Bosley and François Xavier Jauret helped to launch a debate in which a number of interesting questions were raised: does one have to be a poet to be a good translator of poetry? Are certain kinds of poem less easily realized by the translator? Do poems have to be translated afresh for each generation? The conference ended with proposals for much more translation of contemporary poetry, and these have already been partly realized by the production of a bilingual conference booklet (available at £1.30 from the Poetry Society, 21 Ears Court Square, London SW5) which, in addition to reprinting all the conference papers, contains an anthology of nearly 200 French and British poets.



Gentle remainders

It isn't often these days that Sotheby's sell a lot for fifteen pence (plus, of course, a penny-halfpenny buyer's premium), but there were many strange and unworldly happenings at the first of a promised series of sales of "publishers' and other trade overstocks, end-of-edition runs and remainders" last week. The event took place in Hodgson's Rooms, where such sales were regular 100 years ago, and according to a catalogue note the suggestion of a revival had received the enthusiastic assent of a considerable number of booksellers and publishers. Attendance was curious: rather than enthusiastic, books on offer ranged from a few dozen copies of fine printings from the Limited Editions Club to 5,000 Spike Milligrams. HMSO and a couple of university presses were clearing shelves; Clive Bingley had a number of interestingly sincere works in library selection and related disciplines; while many of the bigger houses had run a single title up the flagpole. Catalogue descriptions ranged from "An urbane book written by one of our

few genuine liberals"—Dr Rhoda Boyson "to 'Militarism: a wowl', face values—which were the price on the last sticker rather than the original published price—ranging from 1.45 for the catalogue of Edinburgh University Library to 75p for a paperback edition of Keats's letters.

So here are all these books demurely pulpitizing with renewed hope, like the attendance at the monthly hop of the Left-on-the-Shelf Club, and here are all the move or less eager prospectors in a series of parcels of increasing size, and the buyer of each lot had the option of purchasing some or all of the remaining lots at the same price. Entirely new bidding strategies were called for and this together with a proliferation of buying in names (imaginary bidders) to obscure the fact that the seller reserve has not been reached at the general embarrassment of bidding in tiny sums of money, created an atmosphere of genial confusion over which the auctioneer, Lord Kerr, presided with imperturbable calm. Bidders were urged by a slight tendency to say pounds when he meant pence. There were occasions when a buyer, flushed with pride at securing, say, 100 copies of a book on the creative spirit in Cornwall for a fiver, would observe with chagrin that somebody else had just got 500 at the same price. Sometimes the premium on the smaller lots was so great that one suspected that people would have paid still more for no copies. Buyers bid against themselves or bought the wrong lots; options were exercised and then revoked; a jaunty "I'll take them all" changed to anguish when the bidder turned the page of his catalogue and discovered just what he had let himself in for; and ever and anon bundles which failed to reach the reserve were knocked down to those shadowy names, "anonymous bidders" and "no fixed address".

But there were lots of books, even Messrs Lock, Stock and Barrel—as it might be—could not be induced to bid, and one well intentioned book pushed by the Marriage Guidance Council suffered the shame of being passed at a penny a copy in all its hundreds. You could have had 700 copies of Robert Jay Lifton's book on the psychology of Vietnam veterans for the price of two new copies, and still have had change for half a gross of profits of the Wolmann Institute. Solid bibliographies and works of social history, on the other hand, made solid prices. The moral seems to be the uninspiring one that unsellable books cannot be given away either. But it was an invigorating exercise, and a good time was had by most.

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Evenings at the ouija board

By David Kalstone

JAMES MERRILL:

Divine Comedies

Poems

136pp. Oxford University Press.

£2.95.

With *Divine Comedies*, his seventh book of verse, James Merrill's poetry modulates into a new key and refigures everything he has written before. The most engaging member of the gifted generation of American poets who emerged in the 1950s, Merrill has always known how to sustain and redirect his energies, how not to let himself out or repeat himself, how to survive his gift as many American poets have not. It is a happy irony that though he has been praised for his inventiveness, his technical agility, and for a richness just barely reined in by witty narrative, these qualities have seldom distracted him as much as they have his reviewers. Merrill, with increasing awareness, courage and delight, has been developing an autobiography: "developing" as from a photographic negative which becomes increasingly clear. He has not led that kind of outwardly dramatic life which would make external changes the centre of his poetry. Instead, poetry itself has been one of the changes, something which continually happens to him, and Merrill's subject proves to be the subject of the great Romantics: the constant revisions of the self that come through writing verse. Each book seems more spacious because of the one which has come before.

Still, nothing could have exactly prepared readers for the deep focus of *The Book of Ephraim*, the wild, funny, mysterious long poem which makes up two-thirds of Merrill's *Divine Comedies*. Set against his shorter poems, *The Book of Ephraim* accomplishes something of a transformation scene—as if on a darkened stage where we are accustomed to spotlit figures, suddenly in a blaze of light everyone is in place against a long and deepening perspective. The poem recapitulates much of Merrill's writing career and draws many of its principal characters back on stage. But with them this time taking bows is the director-choreographer, the beguiling muse and eros of Merrill's last twenty years.

He is called Ephraim. He invaded Merrill's life in 1955 in what comes to seem, as the poem goes on, a less and less unorthodox manner; for this poem is "The Book of a Thousand and One Evenings Spent with David Jackson at the Ouija Board." In Touch with Ephraim Our Familiar Spirit" Ephraim is identified (complete with the occasional upper case letters which indicate direct quotation from the board) as "A Greek Jew Boy, an 8 year old, who lived in Greece, WHEN WOLVES & RAVENS WERE IN ROME".

At least a century goes by before One night comes when the soul, revisiting Its deathplace here below, locates and enters

On the spot a sleeping form its own sex and sex (and then done in rural or depopulated areas: E treats us here to the hilarious Upshot of a Sioux brave's having chosen By mistake a hibernating bear).

However comic some of the machinery, the details are valued as a way of extending soul and spirit, whether in dreams or poetry. For while the soul is busy severing its last earthly ties, the dislodged sleeper's spirit "replaces it in Heaven". So: a dream, given in Merrill's friend, Maya Deren, an experimental film maker, and recounted in the poem's richest vein. In a roomful of people in evening dress, chandeliers ablaze, with an unknown admirer,

She is a girl again, his fire-clear Turning her beautiful, limber, wise, Except that she alone wears mourning weeds That weigh unbearably until she leads Her to a spring, or source, oh Whose shining depths her gown turns white, her jet To diamonds, and black veil to bridal snow. Her features are unchanged, yet her pale skin is black, with glowing nodules a not yet Printed self. . . . Then it is time to go. Long trails, his eyes convey, must Intervene. Before they meet again. A first to "fiddle and love". And last lines And fadeout. Dream? She wakes from it in bliss.

Later a favorite of TIBERIUS Diad/ ad 36 on CAPRI throutled/By the imperial guard for having LOVED/ THE MONSTERS NEPHEW (sic) CALIGULA". The bitterness worldliness with which Ephraim addresses his two earthly charges DJ and JM is a clear cousin to Merrill's poised poetic voice. (Both of them it turns out come from broken homes).

While Someone very highly placed up there, Dooning his bonnet, in and out Now famous nose haled the cool The resulting masterpiece takes years to write; More, since the dogma of its day Calls for a Puritany, for a Hell, Both of which Dante thereupon, from fourfold Transposed to expose, Too dim or private to invent, His Heaven, though, as one cannot but sense, Tercet by tercet, is pure Show and Tell.

The table ranges past comedy to rapture and tells a lot about the initial allure of poetry for Merrill. His *First Poem*, in the vein of the *Paradise* he here describes, reflect a young solitary's desire to witness and escape to an ideal world. When he turned to narrative and social comedy, it was always with the sense of a poet's not quite real, that in its flushing action he might catch glimpses of patterns activated by charged moments of his life.

What the young Merrill could not have foreseen was that the future ideal world he was working towards was not an empty evacuated space but instead a rich experience of déjà vu. For him it was, to be full of the past, of luminous figures, the living and the dead, all of whom coexist in *The Book of Ephraim* by virtue of the attention Merrill has given them throughout his work, and the value he has come to attach to them. *The Book of Ephraim* includes figures resonant from earlier poems, now almost icons of love, affection, authority, or creative energy: his mother, his dead father, founder of a large American brokerage; David Jackson, who has shared his life in Stonington and Athens; Hans Lodeizen, the young Dutch poet whose death Merrill elegized in "The Country a Thousand Years of Pines"; Stratis, a Greek subject of Merrill's Cavafy-like sequence in *The Fire Screen*; Maria Mitsotaki, an Athenian Garbo and gardener; Kyria Kleo, his Greek maid; as well as hierarchy masters such as Wallace Stevens and W. H. Auden. They make a community, according to Ephraim, "WITHIN SIGHT OF ALL CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER DEAD OR ALIVE NOW DO U UNDERSTAND BUT I CAN NOT TELL YOU THE SURROUND OF THE LIVING". Of these figures, Ephraim says, "IT IS EASY TO CALL THEM BRING THEM AS FIRES WITHIN SIGHT OF EACH OTHER ON HILLS".

This last wonderful metaphor for the board's powers of convocation is typical of Merrill's untangling use of ouija throughout. It stands in even higher relief beside the poems which precede it. In *Divine Comedies* and which constitute an extended farewell to some of Merrill's cherished themes, "Yannina" and "Lost in Translation" are among the most beautiful poems Merrill has ever written. "Yannina" is a meditation on the town in northern Greece where the amorous and tyrannical legend of All Pasha is still alive—is also a poem in which Merrill completes a loving reidentification with his father. "Lost in Translation" revisits the world of "The Broken Home"—absorbing its tensions and confining it into a more spacious and generous perspective where nothing, finally, is lost. The tale of "Yannina" is a tale of a man and a woman whose doctrine of time reacquainted has long been an article of faith for Merrill, but not until now to be fully realized in his work. He had, after all, twenty years ago in a novel, *The Seraglio*, placed his family at some saving ironic distance. It is precisely Merrill's surprise at his enlarged, nourished and idiosyncratic relation to his past—renewed in American poetry—that *Divine Comedies* records.

Intimacies taken and forgone. It explores the curious paradox—Petrarch brought up to date—that he blandly adds, is a low-budget Remake—imagine—of the *Paradise*. Not otherwise its poet turned the spheres. While Someone very highly placed up there, Dooning his bonnet, in and out Now famous nose haled the cool The resulting masterpiece takes years to write; More, since the dogma of its day Calls for a Puritany, for a Hell, Both of which Dante thereupon, from fourfold Transposed to expose, Too dim or private to invent, His Heaven, though, as one cannot but sense, Tercet by tercet, is pure Show and Tell.

And here was I, or what was left of me, Feared and recoiled in, chafed against, held cheap, A strangeness that was not, had not, had the same allowed for its description, And so brought at least me these spells of odd, Self-effacing balance.

In these contradictions Merrill concentrates the struggles of the poem, the sharp full sense of relinquishment at its close, and the almost involuntary access to another world ("A strangeness . . . allowed for its description"). It is precisely at the moments when writing penetrates beyond memory and renders transparent a familiar social or domestic scene that the poet is most aware of depletion ("what was left of me" his house at the end of the poem is cold and empty. A mysterious and unidentified thief has been and gone. At moments Merrill all too completely shares the feelings of one of the characters in his poem:

Sleep overtakes him clapping what his own clothes.

Yet the surface of this poem is as worldly as its insights are visionary. Everything is grist for Merrill's mill. He pays a call on chimpanzees being taught human language in Oklahoma. He interlaces the poem with the plot of a Los Angeles place near Los Alamos. He receives critiques of the poem in progress from Alexander Pope and Wallace Stevens. In the midst of a climactic encounter in Venice he pauses for what proves not at all a digression to explain what X-ray have revealed about Giorgione's "Tempesta". Behind Merrill's gusto and comic appetite is a surprised certainty that the apparently random materials of our lives and reading, history and gossip—the rational and irrational bombardments—are somehow selected and absorbed for our experience.

The Book of Ephraim could well have appeared alone. It stands in even higher relief beside the poems which precede it. In *Divine Comedies* and which constitute an extended farewell to some of Merrill's cherished themes, "Yannina" and "Lost in Translation" are among the most beautiful poems Merrill has ever written. "Yannina" is a meditation on the town in northern Greece where the amorous and tyrannical legend of All Pasha is still alive—is also a poem in which Merrill completes a loving reidentification with his father. "Lost in Translation" revisits the world of "The Broken Home"—absorbing its tensions and confining it into a more spacious and generous perspective where nothing, finally, is lost. The tale of "Yannina" is a tale of a man and a woman whose doctrine of time reacquainted has long been an article of faith for Merrill, but not until now to be fully realized in his work. He had, after all, twenty years ago in a novel, *The Seraglio*, placed his family at some saving ironic distance. It is precisely Merrill's surprise at his enlarged, nourished and idiosyncratic relation to his past—renewed in American poetry—that *Divine Comedies* records.

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John Fowles: differences among the critics. Photo Fay Godwin.

Falling into a cultural gap as wide as the Atlantic

We may understand the same language, but how does one explain such a difference in literary attitudes when a novel by one of our leading writers is praised to the heights on one side of the Atlantic, but gets the bird on the other?

Never has this been truer than over John Fowles' first novel for eight years, *Daniel Martin*, which was published in the United States last month and here ten days ago. Mr Fowles is one of the few contemporary English novelists who command major critical attention in the United States as well as being a consistent best-seller. Read the American reviews of *Daniel Martin* and one would think, to quote William H. Pritchard in the *New York Times Book Review*, that here is "a masterly fictional creation".

Mr Fowles' glory was short-lived. With a few exceptions (notably in *The Times* and in *The Spectator*) the reviews here have been bad (although this won't prevent him selling 30,000 copies in Britain in hardback, an impressive figure). Aubercon Waugh in the *Evening Standard* was the most forthright: "an atrociously bad novel".

Was he reading the same book as Paul Gray in *Time*? He cited Henry James and then pronounced: "Fowles has created both a startlingly provocative novel and a courageous act of willed humanity". Back in Britain, *Leeds Mercury* and *The Observer* were having little of it. "The writing aches with earnestness, Jamesian cadences losing themselves in awkward asyndets".

Jeremy Treglown in the *New Statesman* agreed: "Even John Fowles' sanest fictions suffer from the long-windedness and dissection that overwhelms this one".

Mr Treglown also makes passing and unfavourable reference to Mr Fowles' previous novel, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, which only eight years before had been awarded the W. H. Smith prize by a distinguished panel, Rupert Hart-Davis, Janet Adam Smith and Christopher Ricks. Now, according to Michael Mason in *The Times Literary Supplement* it has "reached me-down experimentalism in the narrative".

Of the hostile reviews Mr Mason's is the most detailed that I've read. He quotes a chunk of Mr Fowles and then pulls it apart. "The language is woolly and sometimes downright wrong. The punctuation is lousy and inconsistent. The imagery is horribly uncoordinated. The syntax is incoherent, or at best turbid."

Mr Mason also objects to the idea that the first sentence of Mr Fowles' book is the last sentence of *Daniel Martin*'s inquiry first novel. It is a "kind of lumpy salute to Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*". "a device to irritate the eye". Yet to John Gardner in the *American Saturday Review*, it is a strength. To

him Mr Fowles can do no wrong, he is the "only writer in English who has the power, range, knowledge and wisdom of a Tolstoy or James. He is a master stylist". No denigration of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* here. To Mr Gardner *Daniel Martin* goes one better; it is his "best book by far".

This enthusiasm is hardly less marked in *Playboy*. "A vivid graceful tale... Fowles had written an extremely intelligent novel, one that, as you're enjoying the story, forces you to stop and think and marvel at his remarkable prose skill. His characters are well defined and articulate and move in and out of the common with admirable ease. *Daniel Martin* is a long, provocative work—one of the important fiction offerings this fall."

So why this dichotomy? Is *The Times* therefore out of step with English taste in publishing, as it did a fortnight ago, a lengthy extract from *Daniel Martin* in the *Saturday Review*? Should we disregard our critical ally, *Playboy*? She writes: "This novel is a tour-de-force, a work of imaginative energy and passionate honesty whose occasional flaws are immeasurably more fascinating than the small imperfections of many another writer."

Has its length coloured critical attitudes? John le Carré's magnificent new novel, *The Honourable Schoolboy*, has not been immune on this score, although again it was *The Times*' critic, this time H. R. F. Keating, who was warmly in favour where others carped. *Daniel Martin* is 704 pages—"much, much too long", according to Thomas Hinde in the *Sunday Telegraph*. It should "warn editors of the dangers of not daring to edit best-selling authors". And, again, Aubercon Waugh, who couples length with price (£4.95) and works it out at 0.7p a page.

But Americans have never objected to long novels. Sheer size often seems obligatory, and again Americans admire introspection. In fiction, although here Mr Hinde accuses Mr Fowles of forgetting that "elementary novelist's adage: 'character is action'".

Of course there is another explanation: that in the three years since Mr Fowles' previous work, a collection of short stories titled *The Ebony Tower*, critical opinion has swung from the inevitability of a pendulum. It has so many great and gifted writers in the past, Dickens, Shaw, Orwell all had long periods out in the cold, before being recognised as great. I cannot believe that the author of *The Collector*, *The Magus*, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and now *Daniel Martin* will remain for long in such fervent critical disfavour.

Ion Trewin

Literary Editor The Times

John Fowles's novel
'DANIEL MARTIN'
is published by Cape at £4.95

"psychopathological explanation" taken from one Harry Trosman, who, wrapped out of its context in the opening lines of the poem, is glossed by "Memory carries him back to that 1910-11 winter in the Paris pension with Verdenal". The sexual wound suffered by the poet/Fisher King is the loss of Verdenal, and this "has rendered him impotent in his marriage". Concerning the fifth section of the poem, "After the torchlight red on sweaty faces... He who was living is now dead", we are told that any religious meaning should not be allowed to obscure "a clear personal reference to the death of Jean Verdenal, surely the central meaning of the lines". "The awful thing of a moment's surrender—driving an age of prudence can never return," is interpreted as that of Eliot to Verdenal, because the MS version begins "DATTI, my brother, what have we given". Having thus, as he thinks, knocked the heterosexual interpretation of the poem on the head, Miller goes on to test an MS version of the *Daydream* section to clinch the matter. The MS passage runs:

Daydream, friend, my friend, I have heard the key Turn in the door, once and once only.

Miller believes that this key is surely related to the previous "awful driving of a moment's surrender". The self has been gently penetrated only once, and that by the friend. The rest of existence has been a memory of that moment, and a contemplation of the key that was turned.

This is in some ways so coyly put

The odour of death

By D. M. Thomas

J. P. WARD (Editor):
Poetry Wales 12
Vernon Watkins
165pp. Swansea: Christopher Davies, 75p.

VERNON WATKINS:
The Influences
36pp. Bran's Head Books, £8.

GWEN WATKINS and
RUTH RAYOR (Editors):
I That Was Born in Wales
70pp. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, £1.50.

VERNON WATKINS:
Selected Verse Translations
79pp. Enitharmon Press, £3.45 (paperback, £1.95).

It seems a peculiarly apt and happy circumstance that poems by Vernon Watkins should still be pouring off the press, ten years after his death. He was a poet who constantly disputed the borderland between life and death, and his most celebrated poem, "The Ballad of the Mari Lwyd", relates an attempt by the dead, at midnight on New Year's Eve, to enter the house of the living and share their feast. The most special number is Watkins' reworking of this theme, "The Ballad of the Outer Dark". There is a gap of twenty years between the two poems; the later ballad—it is really a compressed verse drama—was broadcast in the year he died.

The return to an earlier success should have been disastrous, but it succeeds brilliantly. There is the same hammering, full-blooded rhythm, the same dignified but simple and natural vocabulary, and word-order.

I was born in the Rhondda, and even from birth that smell of the channel-house teased the earth. And gay though the girls were we walked with as boys. An odour of death always hindered our joys.

Watkins' obsession with the antinomies of life and death, and spirit and the other life, living the other's death—that there seems no reason why he could not have written as many variations as Bach did for Goldberg. He was in the grip of his daemon. Too often, an ornate superstructure disguises a poet's poverty. But here, as so well-wrought, that the life is lost or never found, like a child's skeleton in the foundations of a bridge. Years may have had an intuition of this when he emphasized to his awestruck visitor in 1938—Watkins' notes on his visit to Dublin are reproduced in the *Poetry Wales* number—that nonchalance and luck are essential qualities in a poem. The young poets tell too much. Vernon Watkins told too often to make a poem that wasn't there. But the horse's skull of the "Mari Lwyd" custom was there, and kept grinning at him. It was his necessary poem.

Apart from "The Ballad of the Outer Dark", and six now lyric poems by Watkins, the *Poetry Wales* number is rather lightweight. There are good contributions by David Wright and Marion G. Jones, but their qualities of thought and style are not matched by most of the other contributors. Nothing new is said about Watkins' art. One appreciates the importance of a national magazine providing an outlet for native critics and scholars, but in this case the result is an uncritical and subjective tone: "I cannot read Homer's *Iliad*, but Vernon Watkins' translation of a part of it caused me to recall his little figure nimble leaping up the cliffs of Ponnard, since his rendering of the battle between Greeks and Trojans has a certain open air freshness about it which is very pleasing" (though I enjoyed this poem, I cannot believe that the momentary wild image of Homer leaping up the cliffs of Ponnard).

An article by Desirée Hirst considers the influence on Watkins of the Neo-Platonist Irish Ascendancy poet (sic), W. B. Yeats. The Greek poet's influence on Watkins is all too apparent. *The Influences*, a Yeatsian masque, begun in 1935 and finished, as a script for radio, in 1947, is almost wholly pastiche. Hirst indeed was too much on a work that had no chance of coming to life. "A Hogweed figure, an Old Man ('blear-eyed wisdom') and a Girl ('O body swayed to music'), never find any plain, dramatic reason why they are talking to each other. The Girl introduces herself with a lyric, a music, which starts 'Plato is dead, these ages/And Aristotle's learned school...' Not surprisingly she fails to quicken one's pulse."

It is difficult to know what Professor Miller means, at least he is building upon a supposition, or again, as in *The Waste Land*, he is insinuating a physical relationship between the poet and Verdenal, which, looked at closely, as Eliot's life-long contempt of the penis-key is concerned.

The homosexual interpretation of Eliot will doubtless have other more able defenders. They indeed some evidence to be taken with more scruple than Professor Miller has managed to summarize in *Poetry Wales*. The MS version of "Hysteria" is a clear case of sexual revulsion. When the bridegroom smacked his lips, there was blood on the bed.

At the cheap extinction of taking it, And it includes some lines which seem to refer to homosexual acts by using Whitman's "calamus".

Misunderstood The accents of the new revised Profession of the calamus. But even here Professor Watkins overdoes things, by taking "accents" to be those of *Prin and Other Observations*, whereas, though the last has become indissolubly linked in English tradition with Dick Whittington while Bluebeard has inspired more than one play or opera, but the other fessio Miller, far from suggesting the student of E. E. Schattschneider, has written a book monomaniacally obsessed by its own main theme.

I That Was Born in Wales is a slim, pleasant selection. As I editors intend it will be a book for introducing new readers to Watkins. The poems are thematically grouped, and although the close themes look naïvely uneasy at first sight—Wales, Poetry and the Poet, Dylan Thomas, Life and Death, Practice they work, whatever the sections, and the individual poems throw light upon each other. There are brief helpful notes. The introduction points out that it is not intended to be a representative selection; it does not, for example, include any of his ballads, but poems have been taken from among those the editors consider his best. Their judgment is good, and the book duplicates very little of his work included in the *Faber Selected Poems* of 1967.

More valuable, because more surprising, is the selection of new translations published by the Enitharmon Press, Watkins, a modern languages scholar made nearly 20 translations of European poets. Apart from his versions of *Ulysses* they have not, until now, been gathered together. It is a rich feast. He admirably reconciles the two impossible, contradictory aims of the translator: to serve the foreign poem faithfully and modestly, and at the same time (as he wrote in a letter to the *TLS*, "in an English equivalent which is like an original poem").

His practice lives up to his principles. The versions unmistakably range from the simple to the complex, with the freshness of originals in English. In fact, they often seem more original than many of his own poems. The *Joli de vivre* of the French Renaissance poets, and the harsh, electric style of the Symbolists, release his own style from abstraction and artifice. The problems of reconciling metre with meaning created more lively rhythms than he usually allowed himself in his own verse, and vocabulary takes on more of the "nonchalance" that Yeats advocated. As an example, here is part of Philippe Desportes' "Canzone": It is very much an English poem, yet almost completely literal.

O glad trial of a glorious spirit From so trivial a cost drawing great pleasure O glad failure that makes the year victor and the victim The eternal victor of years! So new a path awoke not strength failed him, but not despair By the fairest of stars he was drawn down.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS 1

Red Riding Hood rides again

CHARLES PERRAULT:
The Fairy Tales
Translated by Angela Carter
Illustrated by Martin Ware
Gollancz, £3.50. (575 022795)

This collection of tales by Charles Perrault, first published nearly three hundred years ago, contains material both familiar and heterogeneous, and poses some practical problems. The first of these is length; as any parent knows, the bedtime story must occupy a minimum time to satisfy the child, but not too much if the narrator is to call the evening his or her own. Of these ten stories the three longest are no less than four times as long as the two shortest. Then, although the general title is "Fairy stories", there are no fairies at all in five of them (unless Jupiter be accounted a fairy), talking animals are prominent in two others, and abnormal human beings, one good, one bad, in two more. It is true that without exception the tales involve magic, that is the suspension of ordinary physical laws, and at least half of them include violence or actual horror.

As for familiarity, four are perennial subjects of Christian pantomime (*Red Riding Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Puss in Boots*), though the last has become indissolubly linked in English tradition with Dick Whittington while Bluebeard has inspired more than one play or opera, but the other five, except perhaps *Hop o' my thumb*, are by no means well known in English. (*The Fairies*, *Ricky with the Tuft*, *English Wishes and Donkey-Skin*). Numerous sources, imitations and analogues exist in a variety of cultures, including Celtic and Oriental, and the most curious of the student of E. E. Schattschneider, has written a book monomaniacally obsessed by its own main theme.

the fairy is not called Lilac or anything else, but a much later, anonymous prose version (published 1781) which, interestingly enough, Flaubert found of outstanding literary merit. Like Andrew Lang's tales from Shakespeare or the Greek myths, these tales of Perrault (of which Lang also published an important edition) exist in their own right as stories, with certain essential, unalterable, ritual elements of dialogue and detail (like "Sister Anne, Sister Anne..." or Cinderella's pumpkin coach) within an otherwise elastic literary form.

Perrault himself offers an alternative ending to *Hop o' my thumb*, and the Grimm Brothers' happy ending to *Red Riding Hood* is almost certainly better known than Perrault's, in which girl and grandmother are both eaten but not rescued. In such condition it means that the story is a "correct" version, but this is not to impugn the value of Perrault's, the first literary version published.

In her foreword to this stylish



Ricky with the Tuft and Red Riding Hood, the Wolf, two of Martin Ware's illustrations for The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault.

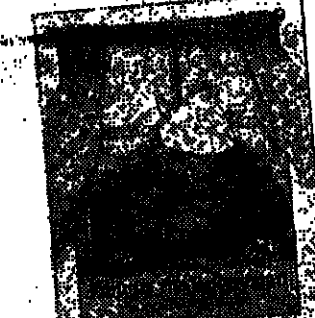
FUNGUS THE BOGEYMAN

by Raymond Briggs

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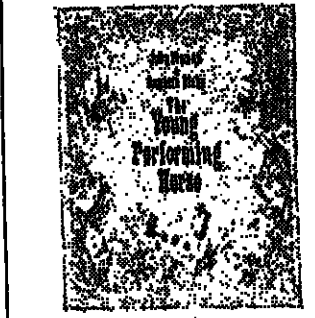
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Ages 4-7 £2.95

HOW THE ROOSTER SAVED THE DAY

by Arnold and Anita Lobel

A farmyard drama for the very young, superbly illustrated and full of colourful detail.

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Ages 4-7 £2.75

Listen with father

RICHARD HUGHES:
The Wonder-Dog
Illustrated by Antony Maitland
Chato and Windus, £3.95.
(7011 5091 2)

In these brief stories, as in his adult novels, Richard Hughes's writing is at once enigmatic and direct. The opening of every story bounces you straight into the middle of a situation. "Once upon a time there was a little girl who lived in a tangly forest all by herself; and the only thing she was afraid of was the snakes." And you are launched on to a slide of fantasy that ends with a satisfying bump. It is the incongruity and the anarchic elements in fantasy that Hughes seems to enjoy. The stories inhabit a territory between nonsense and surrealism (though the castles, which includes walking toys, talking animals, kings and queens and mermaids and witches, often comes from fairy-tale). There is no attempt to elaborate the narratives



A. J. Krailsheimer



Myra Barrs

or to build an atmosphere. The story of "The Motherly Pig", for example, opens on top of a hill near a gorse patch, where the motherly pig lives by selling bunches of gorse to passers-by. An old man appears, pushing a bicycle. He refuses to buy the gorse at the asking price and sets fire to the gorse patch in a fury; in retaliation the pig pedals off on his bicycle, meets with an accident, and is rescued by a police stranger whom she later discovers (almost too late) to be a pork butcher. The whole of this bizarre and often potentially violent story is told in five pages. The tone is fluidly matter-of-fact and yet one quickly becomes aware that anything can happen. The straight-faced humour of this style must have been greatly enjoyed by the original audience.

We know from Hughes's foreword that the stories were all told rather than written in the first place and their origins would, in any case, have been clear both from the storyteller's voice that speaks through them, and from the engaging sense they all give of being impromptu creations. Many of the turns of the plot must have originated in spontaneous improvisation of a storyteller who discovers he is painting himself into a corner and escapes by means of an imaginative leap.

This complete edition brings together Hughes's previously published stories and adds one new story. It is good to have all of the stories; it is invaluable to have Hughes's foreword to the edition, written shortly before his death, setting out the circumstances of the original telling and his own discoveries of what children wanted, demanded or needed from him as a storyteller. Often they would suggest themselves and he makes plain how, for him at any rate, storytelling as opposed to story writing was not only a shared pleasure but a collaborative activity. So was the writing down, for children had to be called on to tell back what the storyteller had forgotten.

Myra Barrs

THE REUNION

by Joan Lingard

In this sequel to *The Cleanse, The Resettling and The Pilgrimage*, Maggie McKintley sets off alone for a new life in Canada and a very special reunion.

Ages 12-14 £3.25



Ages 12-14 £3.25

RED HART MAGIC

by Andre Norton

An exciting "time warp" fantasy set in three tumultuous periods of English history.

Ages 10-13 £3.25



Ages 10-13 £3.25

HAMISH HAMILTON **hh** CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Boys in the band

PETER CARTER:
Under Gollath
Oxford University Press, £2.95.
(19 271405 8)

Secularism in Ulster is a major social evil that calls for special treatment in children's fiction. So far, it has suggested an obvious moral pattern based on a process of confrontation and erosion, and this provides a framework for Peter Carter's story of Belfast in the months before August 1969. The hero is Alan Kenton, a young Protestant "of sorts", a boy whose ambition is to play the lamb, the "war-drum of Ulster". He joins an Orange band:

"Remember", Mackracken would say, "remember, we are going to play for the glory of Ulster and the Protestant Cause. 'Twas King Billy saved us from the tyranny of Rome, so bang and blow, my lads, and let the world hear us."

Propaganda has an effect, though in this case it is only superficial. In a tight corner, faced with a Catholic piper from a rival band across the park, Alan comes out with the traditional taunt, "Taig! Dirty Taig!" he yells; red-lipped

Fergus responds with "Dirty Proid". But the exchange, surprisingly, is the preliminary to a brief phase of friendship.

As the marching season progresses, violence breaks out in the city. Alan is caught in the Falls Road rioting that led to the burning of Catholic Bombay Street. By taking two ordinary teenagers as his central characters, Peter Carter has done away with the need to acknowledge complexities of motive or ideology in the situation.

It is necessary to point out some inaccuracies in the text. Emain Macha, not Tara, was the seat of the kings of Ulster; there was no IRA campaign in 1951; there is no such thing as "a Mass of Good Intention". These are minor points, but they do have a cumulative effect.

On the whole, however, the novel has much to recommend it. The style often has a rather jaunty lyrical quality, in keeping with the image of a drummer boy. There are no subtleties in the author's approach; but he has made a judicious attempt to simplify, in moral terms, the nightmare confusions that can arise from bigotry in all its aspects.

Patricia Craig

CATHERINE COOKSON

her new children's novel

Go Tell It To Mrs Golightly

Warm, affectionate Bella Dodd, blind but unconquerable, is the young heroine of a lively story set in Mrs Cookson's beloved 'north east'.

Illustrated by Margery Gill

£2.75

Macdonald and Jane's

Pater unfamiliar

CONSTANCE C. GREENE:

I Know You, Al

Kestrel, £2.50 (7226 5361 1)

KEVIN THORVALD:

Instead of a Dad

Illustrated by Kees de Kieffe

Translated by Francine Lee Miro

Kestrel, £2.95 (7226 5273 9)

How interested are children in the problems of their parents? How much do they understand about the pressures and complexities of adult life? The answer is clear: only where the children themselves are affected do they show either interest or understanding. The central factor is the degree to which the child is brought into the problem by the parent.

I Know You, Al, has a teenage narrator. This instantly establishes a generation barrier and a non-involvement pact. "They" are the adults on whom affectionate attention is lavished. The adolescents are arrogant and contemptuous of their elders, but ruefully aware, nevertheless, of their own dependence.

Al is the narrator's best friend. She is a divorced mother who works in Better Dresses and provides for current sticks instead of cookies. The words that can be said about Al's mother's new date is that he leaves a strong smell of aftershave in the elevator—and that is bad. When Al's father, who has

Easy riders

ADRIENNE RICHARD:

Into The Road

Gollancz, £3.25 (575 02343 0)

Nat is an orphaned teenager, a pleasant, conscientious young man brought up in Boston, Massachusetts, by his uncle whom he helps in his delicatessen. But he lacks fibre, the nerve to look after himself. His comfortable life has changed and, inhibited him. One day, a scene erupts in his brother, Cyrus, who left home years ago after a fierce disagreement with the uncle. He is a "biker" riding a Harley-Davidson, above in manner, uncouth in appearance but meticulous and loving in his relationship with motor-bike machinery. He persuades Nat to buy a bike and after a month spent selecting a second-hand BMW and getting it into per-

fect condition, they hit the road. On their way they have many adventures. They fall in with Hell's Angels, attend races, live in the open, collect, ride with and quarrel over a girl, and become involved (innocently) in an ugly crime. After all is done, Nat has hardened up, learnt about life and companionship from the world of bikers—who are depicted with great sympathy. The brothers will part, Cy to travel the roads and Nat to return to his old life. There is rather too much of the "what a man's gotta do" philosophy in *Into The Road* (or perhaps it is merely alien to an English reviewer). Where Adrienne Richard excels is in describing the detailed emotional and physical sensations involved in motor-bike riding. At times the reader's adrenalin really surges.

Gerard Benson

not seen her for six years, telephones to invite Al to his wedding. She is thrown. Her confidence is so shaken that she does not say goodbye with the usual "Have a good day". Excruciatingly uncomfortable new shoes temper the anxiety; the wedding is perfect and Al forgives her father for deserting her. But it is for her mother that the new compassion has really developed.

Constance C. Greene has a good eye for teenage behaviour and a good ear for the bare and language of adolescents. Fully versed (if not experienced) in sexual matters, they are still easily shocked; the thrilling discovery of a filthy process known as artificial insemination can scarcely be credited.

This is a pleasant, wry book that manages to look at and with its characters—an approach that makes the simplest statement delightfully subtle: "We both want to take lessons in belly-dancing but so far haven't asked our mothers."

Translated from the Swedish into somewhat curious English with American trimmings, *Instead of a Dad* has not the faintest glimmer of humour to relieve its bleak little story. Magnus is the only child of a beautiful young single parent who takes up with a reformed bank robber and alcoholic. With or without (and as the story progresses and the bad old ways set in, it is more without than with) his pseudo-Dad, Magnus is perforce heavily involved in his mother's emotional life. He resents Luffe's possession of his

fact condition, they hit the road. On their way they have many adventures. They fall in with Hell's Angels, attend races, live in the open, collect, ride with and quarrel over a girl, and become involved (innocently) in an ugly crime. After all is done, Nat has hardened up, learnt about life and companionship from the world of bikers—who are depicted with great sympathy. The brothers will part, Cy to travel the roads and Nat to return to his old life. There is rather too much of the "what a man's gotta do" philosophy in *Into The Road* (or perhaps it is merely alien to an English reviewer). Where Adrienne Richard excels is in describing the detailed emotional and physical sensations involved in motor-bike riding. At times the reader's adrenalin really surges.

Many teenagers may be amazed by the domestic disasters, realize similar characters among older friends, and readily accept it as an easy choice for girls to enjoy reading about "real life" depicted in magazine serials. But the need to think too deeply about genuine problems. A wise way will miss the subtle observation, occasional but acute, relationships and environment.

Cecilia Gordon

About anything, any old how

ALASDAIR ASTON (Editor):

Poets in School

Harrap, £2.65 (245 53166 1)

The Poetry Society's Poets in Schools project has been an admirable and, by many accounts, successful attempt to encourage meeting of poets and secondary school children on an informal yet highly constructive basis. However, as the record of an experiment, this book is sadly inadequate—amounting, as it does, to little more than another anthology of moderately interesting school-mag verse. Are the poems supposed to be the best produced by the schools involved in the scheme since its inception in 1969, or are they merely representative of exactly what? We are not told. The blurb, of course, shrills—as blubs presumably must—about the "veritable flood of verse" produced by the school visits ("And what a variety!"). And announces, with the patronizing affluence of a neighbourhood newspaper's "Poets Corner", a "delightfully refreshing collection of budding poetic talents". But one's suspicions are really aroused when it credits Stephen Spender, the guest eminence called in to provide a brief prefatory assessment, with a remark which he does not, in fact, make. "In his preface, Stephen Spender suggests that this collection offers the real pleasures of raw poetry." Well, it may just be possible to infer as much from his comments, but in nothing he actually writes does he seem that enthusiastic. His reservations, in fact, are considerable.

Today young poets can write any number of poems about pretty well anything. A trouble might be, however, that the price of the ability to write about anything is that people do write about anything—and any old how. And some of the young poets in the collection seem to have learned this lesson of the modern idiom too easily. Indeed, among much which is very agreeable to read, there is a very little that seems strikingly better than anything else in the volume.

This is a sensible observation and, for those familiar with most of the efforts produced in Poetry Workshops, it is entirely likely. As Spender sees the project, it is an interesting and important experiment because it has helped to remove from the minds of children the idea that there is something alarming and "special" about a poem, and because it may at least have the result of teaching some children to be readers of poetry in the future. In short, he attempts a useful evaluation of a scheme one anticipates learning about in detail, and in a tone utterly at odds with the publisher's euphoria.

Then follows a disappointment. What one needs, and needs badly, is a selection of the poems that will place the poems that follow in their proper context; but what the editor provides is a mere three pages, a good half of which consists of contrasting accounts by Adrian Henri and David Harcourt of what they have learnt from their involvement. This short run-down lists the schools that have taken part (a fascinating range across the public and private sectors), acknowledges the generous sponsorship of what they have learnt from their involvement. This short run-down lists the schools that have taken part (a fascinating range across the public and private sectors), acknowledges the generous sponsorship of what they have learnt from their involvement.

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Henri's lively observations. Presumably, since their reports have been singled out, Henri and Harcourt attended their school (schools) together, but this is not made sufficiently clear for a reader seeking precise information on the workings of the scheme. One incidental result of this particular lack of emphasis is that the following little piece from the anthology becomes deprived of the adequate background information which might have given it some significance rather than leaving it as a slight observation surrounded by a trendy acreage of white paper.

We had two poets come to our school today. I liked them. They read poems. And one even tried to sing. They told us about poetry. We had two poets come to our school today.

I liked them. A charming enough summary of an unusual school day, but aren't the children coming across this on their library shelf likely to retort "So what?" Is it really going to "lead to more active participation in poetry" or is it a mere token gesture of the publisher's hope for the anthology rather than an expression of faith in the scheme. Of course, I'm being unfair, in that this is not typical of the best work to be found in *Poets in School*, but my point is that it has been somewhat betrayed by a failure to put it sufficiently in context. If it is representative, we need to be told exactly what it represents: a collection of children's (or class's) mins and achievements.

Then there is one more area that is not made clear enough. I gather that in many of the schools the sequence of visits has culminated in a modest festival. At this occasion, often attended by parents, a selection of the best poems have been chosen to be read aloud, and small awards—financed through the scheme's funds—presented to their authors. Although there is some reference made to the organizing of commercially sponsored poetry competitions by the Poetry Society's education secretary, a full explanation of what this involved or achieved is not offered. If it had been, with Stephen Spender's wish, occasioned by the flat level of accomplishment, that some "split of competitiveness" might have been encouraged could at least have been counterbalanced.

So what are we left with? I am afraid the judgment must be an excellent scheme poorly served by a mediocre and inadequately informative book. Much more striking poetry can be found in, for example, Denys Thompson's *Children as Poets* or the collection of poems resulting from the *Daily Mirror Literary Competitions*. I cannot imagine many children getting much excitement from the majority of the poems selected, though the fact that they were written in of great educational importance. There are some nice humorous pieces—a few of them, like Jane Clark's "Mr Tolgate", striking deeper chords.

Michael Rosen: "Wouldn't You Like To Know" Illustrated by Quentin Blake Deutsch, £2.50 (233 96902 0)

Yes, Michael Rosen's trick title really works. "What's that book you've got for review?" they ask. "Wouldn't You Like To Know?" I reply. "Go on, tell us!" "Wouldn't You Like To Know?" And so on. Eventually: "It's any good?" "Well, yes, it is," I admit.

Chippy, relaxed and good-humoured, Rosen satisfies most of the demands that children make of poems, playing for family sentiment, inventing silly phrases, insulting authority. There are poems about food, games, a lost dog. There is a letter from lamp-post and a poem of the phoenix. Is there too much variety? Some of the pieces fail to live up to the standard of panache he sets. The poem about the boy who kills in adventures' couples in order to get sent to bed as a short story, for instance. The verse element has to fight for a hearing. I would have preferred

They love the gay and hectic life, Mr Tolgate and his wife. The two of them are very queer, but neither ever sheds a tear. There is plenty of authentic classroom wit, a number of sentiments of a genuinely disturbing sadness, two remarkably sophisticated poems by D. B. Pinter and Lindsay Morris, a neat parody of Voltaire's "The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna" by Christopher Anson, a few attractive pieces in the haiku idiom, and this beautiful piece of observation—"Cat on Bed"—by Helen Conway:

Round, fat, full-of-fish cat, High polished, dozy in the early afternoon, Snaking up the full-blown sun that slides in silently, Settling on his fur—an invisible rainbow blanket.

Nose tucked under one paw— Ear tucked under other, And white fur from his affluent tummy Overflows above his tucked round tail and hind-legs— Contrasts with the shiny hump of Curves round to his damp little nose And red rough tongue that slips out— Reach out and lay the stretched tense palm of my hand Gently on his side And feel the soft hot fur and gentle breathing.

The royalties from the sales of *Poets in School* go to the project, and therefore I wish I could praise the book more highly. But, lacking either a full introduction or a good number of really surprising poems, it seems to fall between two shelves. Though carefully assembled, it is nevertheless quite handsomely produced, so perhaps I should say to the interested teacher or librarian—buy it, find out more about the scheme and take advantage of the contact it offers.

Find out more about the Arts Council's (and Eastern Arts Association's) Writers in Schools projects, and arrange carefully planned visits, because in my experience—both as poet and teacher in the classroom is invariably stimulating for everyone involved, as this excellent comment from David Harcourt clearly indicates:

Maybe it's also important to realize—as a kind of fail-safe to the enthusiasm of teachers, kids and sometimes writers—that it's not possible to teach children to write deathless verse; it simply is not a form which lends itself to juvenile prodigiousness. One can, though, look at their work sympathetically, encourage, advise and listen; from time to time there are some real surprises. One can, in short, show kids that poetry isn't quite what they might have thought, and let them take it from there. The visiting poets, too, might discover that the current attitude to poetry in schools isn't quite what they thought.

John Mole


Poetry with panache

MICHAEL ROSEN:
"Wouldn't You Like To Know"
Illustrated by Quentin Blake
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There's a long, slightly heartless poem about fishing which non-fishermen like myself may find to be a bit in. On the other hand, Rosen can sympathize with wasps ("The ragged old edge of tin/And who am I to dare to drag this weak waist/Across that edge?"), and may therefore appear sensitive children who have not yet sorted out their priorities in Animal Rights.

Quentin Blake's familiar, fast scribbles underline Rosen's descriptive shorthand, while leaving the vein of controlled surrealism to work on its own—which is just right. The illustrations in places actually help to explain the poems (in terms of nonsense for instance), which is also well conceived. All in all, this is an extremely likable book, well designed and printed.

John Fuller



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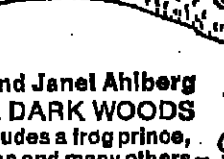
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